

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School

Morehead State University

October 30, 2018

STRATEGIES FOR THRIVING:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BLACK TEACHERS
WHO PARTICIPATED IN MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY'S TEACHER
PREPARATION PROGRAM

Abstract of Capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

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Radcliff, Kentucky

Committee Chair: Daryl R. Privott, Assistant Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

October 30, 2018

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As the number of minority K-12 students continues to rise it is pertinent that minority teachers are present in classrooms across the United States. There are many benefits associated with the presence of minority teachers. Minority teachers often teach in hard-to-staff schools and possess a familiarity with the cultural assets that minority students contribute to the academic setting. Moreover, minority students are referred at lower rates for discipline and special education services when minority teachers are present.

Research confirms the hindrances that minority college students face during their attendance at predominantly White institutions as teacher education majors. These obstacles have a negative impact on their persistence toward graduation, certification, and degree attainment. In addition, factors such as social adjustment, lack of access to diverse curriculum and faculty, teacher preparation program entrance requirements, and certification tests eliminate aspiring teachers at various points of the teacher pipeline.

This study examined the lived experiences of six Black teachers to determine the factors that contributed to their success as undergraduate students at Morehead State University as teacher education majors. A qualitative research design consisting of eight semi-structured questions and a Critical Race Framework was used.

Several consistent themes emerged 1) participation in extracurricular activities and social organizations was beneficial for the participants, 2) microaggressions served as stressors and were experienced during observation and student teaching experiences, 3) microaggressions occurred in the classroom, 4) the presence of Black faculty and staff inspired the participants, 5) counter-spaces served as a source of empowerment.

Findings from this study support the continued investigation of the experiences of Blacks who aspire to become certified teachers.

KEYWORDS: (Black teacher shortages, minority teacher shortages, minority teachers, Black teachers, Black college student retention)

Candidate Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

This capstone is dedicated to my parents, grandparents, husband, daughter, extended family, friends, and supporters. Without your encouragement, the completion of this project would not have been possible. Your belief in my ability to persist and achieve has helped me to persevere. To my study participants, thank you for sharing your lived experiences. The lives of future aspiring teachers will be enhanced.

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“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”- Galatians 6:9. The immense support of my professors, family, friends, peers, colleagues, and cohort members has contributed to the completion of my journey as a doctoral student and the new opportunities that await me.

To my parents, thank you for instilling in me the value of education. To my husband and daughter, thank you for your support and patience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Data presented by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for 2014 reflected an increase in the number of minority students who attend public schools across the United States (AACTE, 2013; Kena, Musus-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, 2015; McFarland et al., 2017). More specifically, the NCES predicted steady growth among Hispanic and Asian students, a slight decrease in the enrollment of Black students, and a decline in the enrollment of White students (NCES, 2017). The aforementioned demographic changes in K-12 student enrollment have presented new challenges for America's public education system. These challenges include growth among the number of students who represent low socioeconomic statuses, an increase in English Language Learners, significant racial differences between teachers and their students, the resegregation of schools and shortages among physical, financial, cultural, and human capital (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2015; Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2014; Maxwell, 2014). The aforesaid challenges will continue to contribute to the historical achievement gaps that exist among Black elementary, middle, and high school students in comparison to their peers causing the academic achievement of Black students to remain at the forefront of issues that confront public schools (Dee, 2005; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003; Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014; Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Although there are many factors that impact the academic success of students, teachers have been identified as the most critical influence during a student's K-12 academic career (Dee, 2005; Downey, von Hippel, & Hughes, 2008; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 1998; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Teachers are critical influencers to student learning because they affect non-cognitive and cognitive factors such as attendance and academic growth (Gershenson, 2016). Hanushek (2002) found that quality teachers can produce gains of one- and one-half grade levels. Though significant growth has occurred in the number of Blacks who earn postsecondary degrees, Black teachers remain underrepresented in K-12 classrooms and are being eliminated from the teacher pipeline before they graduate from college (Chetty, Hendren, Lin, Majerovitz, & Scuderi, 2016; Dee, 2005; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Despite overwhelming evidence regarding the benefits of increasing teacher diversity across the United States, the teaching force within America's K-12 school remains White and female (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2008).

There are crucial periods within the teacher pipeline. These periods include postsecondary enrollment, enrollment in teacher preparation programs, postsecondary graduation, entering the workforce, and teacher retention (United States Department of Education, 2016). At each of the periods diversity diminishes. The beginning of the pipeline encompasses college admission. Colleges that use competitive admission practices can exclude underrepresented populations, which creates leaks in the

pipeline. Once admitted some Black students who attend predominantly White institutions express concerns adjusting both socially and culturally to the environment and leave causing additional leaks in the pipeline. For teacher education majors, teacher education program entrance requirements and standardized certification exams hinder the retention and final certification of Black teacher education majors who were admitted into college and successfully adjusted (Byrd & Singh, 2014). There is an immense need to understand the experiences that undergraduate minority teacher education majors face. More specifically, their interactions with others, the extent to which they receive support, feel supported, their preparation, and how they persevere in the face of adversity. The stories and voices of Black teacher education majors who successfully satisfy degree and certification requirements are missing from existing literature. These stories are essential in improving academic outcomes for all Black students (Szeci & Spillman, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to explore the perceptions of six Black alumni of Morehead State University about their experiences and the factors that sustained them during their attendance as teacher education majors. This insight may potentially result in enhancements to the institution's teacher preparation program and other institutional supports provided to Black and minority students. In addition to providing feedback to the research site, this study has the potential to contribute information to other higher education institutions across the Commonwealth of

Kentucky. Two research questions were designed to reveal vital information about the lived experiences of the participants. The questions that guided this study were:

1. How do Black alumni of Morehead State University's teacher preparation program describe their experiences?
2. What factors sustained Black teachers during their pre-service teaching experience at Morehead State University? Gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black teacher education majors and the factors that influenced their success will help colleges and universities adapt important elements of teacher education programs such as curriculum, the hiring of faculty, observation and student teaching assignments, and other essential supports. Ultimately, this study was intended to contribute to existing literature about the experiences of Black students who participate in teacher preparation programs at predominantly White institutions. This study was designed to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that are needed to achieve success and empower Black teacher education majors. Having a broader understanding of the experiences of Black Teacher education majors may potentially increase the number of certified teachers who receive training at the research site and across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Rationale of Study

Federal legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided new access to predominantly White institutions for underrepresented populations. However, the increase in minority student populations also created new challenges. A robust amount of

literature exists that examines the experiences of Black students who attend predominantly White colleges, the recruitment and retention of Black students, national teacher shortages, and Black teacher shortages (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Kearney, 2008; Szecsi & Spillman, 2012; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Studies exist that highlight the experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions and minority teacher shortages (Farinde, LeBlanc, Otten & Otten, 2015; Frank, 2003). However, this study aimed to highlight the factors that empowered and contributed to the success of Black teachers who attended Morehead State University for initial teacher certification. The growing number of minority students who are entering classrooms across the nation and the shortage of Black teachers in the Commonwealth of Kentucky justified its need.

Theoretical Framework

Borgatti (1996) suggested that establishing a theoretical framework helps to develop an appropriate research design, identify data collection strategies, and interpret results. Establishing a theoretical framework also helps to prevent bias (Borgatti, 1996). Using a theoretical lens that considered the unique experiences and ability of the participants in overcoming obstacles and challenge was important in describing the lived experiences of Blacks who pursued teacher education as a major at Morehead State University. It was important that this study's framework provide the participants with a chance to contribute their voice while simultaneously inverting stories told by dominant society. Therefore, Critical Race Theory was an appropriate framework. Fed up with the slow progress of racial reform and stagnant results of the

Civil Rights movement during the 1960s, Bell and Freeman identified the need for a new approach to synthesize not only racism but also fuel change during the 1970s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical Race Theory emerged from the Critical Legal Studies movement and criticism that Critical Legal Studies did not speak to the racism that existed in law. Critical Race Theorists aimed to identify the manner that race and racism impacted minorities (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The framework of Critical Race Theory includes several tenets. These tenets include counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest conversion, and the critique of liberalism. For this study, Critical Race Theory provided an opportunity for minorities to share their lived experiences and counter stories told by dominant groups about the experiences of Black teacher education majors at predominantly White institutions and the desire of Blacks to become teachers (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

For this study, counter-storytelling was used to reframe deficit-orientated literature that solely focuses on the failure of Blacks in becoming certified teachers. Counter-storytelling, as described by Ladson-Billings (2013), provides an opportunity to describe and place emphasis on the lived experiences and experiential knowledge of marginalized populations and contradict stories told by dominant society. This was an important aspect of the study since the lived experiences of Blacks and other minorities are often left out of literature or told through the point of view of others. Stories give wisdom and build camaraderie. Storytelling also provides a useful way of comprehending and analyzing life (Amoah, 1997). Amoah (1997) asserted that

through storytelling and narrative individuals who have been oppressed can position themselves against marginalization and create their presence.

Significance of Study

The United States Department of Education identified a significant gap in completion rates among Black and White teacher education majors. More specifically, 73% of White teacher education majors earned a degree in contrast to 42% of Black teacher education majors (United States Department of Education, 2016). Researching the perceptions of Black teachers about their experiences has the potential to increase awareness among teacher educators and university personnel about aspects of teacher education programs that deter and empower Black teacher education majors in progressing.

This study was designed to bring to light ways that teacher educators and higher education personnel can support aspiring Black teachers during their pre-service experiences. Insights learned from this study could potentially result in more supports and enhancements to the Morehead State University teacher preparation program and the level of support given to Black and minority students. As a result, Morehead State University and similar institutions might experience increased enrollment, improved retention, and higher matriculation among Black teacher education majors. Future students will benefit from this study by learning about the strategies used to cope with, overcome and persist in the face of obstacles.

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

The biases and assumptions held by the researcher include the belief that if Black college students are exposed to more Black teachers during their own K-12 educational experience, more Black college students might pursue education. Teacher education program entrance exams, lack of intentional supports, and standardized entrance requirements prevent Black students from successfully entering and graduating from teacher education programs as certified teachers. The stressors required to navigate through the education setting at predominantly White institutions and limited exposure to Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions serve as deterrents to Black college students. The researcher has an immense amount of familiarity with the institution as a graduate of the institution's teacher education program and a former employee.

Limitations

This study was designed to explore the experiences of Black teachers who graduated from one institution in Kentucky about their experiences as undergraduate students. The most evident limitation of the study was the use of a homogeneous group of participants since each participant attended the same institution. Therefore, the findings can only be generalized to a small sample of Black teachers who attended one specific institution in the Commonwealth of Kentucky and majored in teacher education. Also, only the perspectives of alumni who successfully achieved initial teacher certification were used. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all Black students who pursued teacher education as a major. Further, the experiences of

Blacks who attended other institutional types, in other geographic locations may differ. The researcher only sought the perspectives of Black alumni who achieved certification as an undergraduate student. Individuals who achieved certification as graduate students or through alternative methods may have provided different insights not included in this study. Although limitations were present, the information captured from this qualitative phenomenological study will contribute to existing literature about the experiences of Black teachers and their journey toward earning initial certification at predominantly White institutions and teacher shortages. The researcher intended to identify and share new themes and perspectives that are absent or limited in prior studies addressing the topic of Black teacher shortages.

Definition of Terms

Predominantly White Institution: An institution that was historically established to educate White students and has a small representation of minorities.

African American or Black: A person of African ancestry.

Success: For this study, success was defined as successfully graduating from the research site with a degree in teacher education, while also achieving initial teacher certification after the participant's undergraduate academic coursework was complete.

Minority: The term minority is used to refer to individuals who have historically been exploited, experienced prejudice and hardship, been perceived as inferior, and/or received unequal treatment and endured discrimination due to the color of their skin (Wilkinson, 2015).

Chapter Summary

The subject of teacher shortages, especially minority teacher shortages is a pressing concern in the United States. Though statistics that describe K-12 student diversity clearly show an increased representation of minority students in classrooms, Black teachers remain disproportionately underrepresented in elementary, middle, and high schools across the United States of America (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas, 2010; McFarland et al., 2017; Palaich, Reichardt, O'Brien, McDaniel, Wool, & McClelland, 2014; Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2014). Our nation's teaching staff remains predominately White, female, middle-class, and recipients of pre-certification training at predominately White institutions (Batchelder, 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Griffin & Tackie, 2017; Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Slater, 2008; Strauss, 2015).

Minorities who are interested in entering the teaching profession encounter obstacles such as family influence, teacher education program entrance requirements, under-preparedness, and issues passing teacher licensure tests (Skilbeck & Connell, 2003). For minorities who attend predominately White institutions, hindrances are even more prevalent and challenging as students face issues with sense of belonging, discrimination and microaggressions, and cultural adjustment (Flowers, 2004; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Museus, 2008). Qualitative studies have established that Black pre-service teachers must possess resiliency to effectively navigate through the many challenges that will confront them before becoming a certified teacher (Bobek, 2003; Tait, 2008). Understanding the factors that contribute

to the success and empowerment of Black college students is instrumental in addressing the needs of Black teacher education majors. This study aimed to describe the obstacles that undergraduate Black teacher education majors experience and the mechanisms that they use to persevere. Literature that examined the historical presence of Blacks as teachers, the experiences of Black college students at predominantly White Institutions and the experiences of Black college students as participants in predominantly White teacher education programs served as the basis for this study. Critical Race Theory served as a framework for this study. Exploring the experiences of Black teacher education majors will not only identify areas of growth for institutions of higher education but also provide insight into strategies that can be implemented by colleges to improve upon the number of Black students that graduate as certified teachers.

Organization of Capstone

Chapter one introduced the study, identified the problem, introduced the research questions, defined key terms, study limitations, and described the significance of the study to higher education, Morehead State University, and teacher education preparation programs. Chapter two provides a brief review of related literature, including the experiences of Black teachers and Black college students who attend predominantly White institutions and the coping strategies that Black students use to persist and graduate. Chapter three outlines the methodology. Aspects such as site selection, data collection methods, the data analysis process, sample population selection, instrumentation, and ethical considerations are discussed. Chapter four

introduces the study participants, study findings, and the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the data. Common themes identified, discussed, and analyzed.

Lastly, chapter five summarizes findings and offers recommendations for the research site based on participant responses. Next steps and suggestions for future research are also presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Black Teacher

Black communities have historically trained teachers (Roberts, 2017).

Teaching was attractive because it afforded opportunities for advancement, security, prestige, and status (Cole, 1986; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Irvine, 1988). In her book *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) described the strong relationships that existed between Black schools, Black teachers, Black students, and the Black community before integration. Black teachers took a personal interest in students and taught generations of Black families. They also lived in the communities that they taught in which provided exposure to students both in and out of school and saw the benefits of devoting their time and resources for the greater good of the community and future of the race (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1996). Black teachers were viewed as skilled professionals who not only cared about the academic success of students but also showed concern for their personal and social growth (Gay, 2004). Siddle Walker explained that Black teachers conducted home visits and participated in professional development training to intentionally meet the needs of the students. The profound understanding of Black culture held by Black teachers was instrumental in the academic success of Black students.

Hawkins (as cited in Hudson & Holmes, 1994) found that prior to 1954 there were nearly 82,000 Black teachers who taught two million Black students. The

Brown decision caused the removal of more than 38,000 Black teachers and school leaders from schools. Since then the number of Black teachers has continued to decrease over the past six decades. Contemporary data indicate that minority teachers represent nearly 20% of the teaching force, of that number Blacks account for 7% of teachers. However, minority students represent nearly half of K-12 student enrollment (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; NCES, 2015; Strauss, 2017; Taie & Goldring, 2017).

Several factors contributed to the onset of the minority teacher shortage. These factors included race relations, access to new educational opportunities for Blacks and other minorities, and the aftereffects of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Gay, 2004). The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision resulted in legal and societal changes that negatively affected the education of minority populations within public schools (Gay, 2004). Access to new opportunities in housing, employment, education for Blacks dismantled Black communities. Black schools became undervalued as integration shaped the conception that Black students could achieve parity by attending integrated schools (Gay, 2004).

During integration, Black teachers were both professionally and personally attacked. Milner and Howard (2004) revealed that light-skinned teachers were integrated into desegregated schools while dark-skinned teachers remained in segregated settings or forced to find new careers. The perception existed that light-skinned teachers were able to connect with Whites. However, they were disrespected and recurrently challenged (Gordon, 2005; Milner & Howard, 2004). Black teachers

were demoted and Black schools were closed, Black students attended schools outside of their communities, the quality of education that Black students received changed, and the best Black teachers were transferred to integrated schools in demoted capacities (Gay, 2004; Ethridge, 1979; Foster, 1998; Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004).

Research suggests that racial pairing or being taught by a teacher of the same race has a positive impact on the academic achievement of Black students (Cherng & Haplin, 2016; Dee, 2004; Dee, 2005; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). Kleinfield (1972) found that a teacher's perception of a student is more significant to the academic self-concept of a Black student than their White peers who are more significantly influenced by their parents. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University concluded that Black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college if they are exposed to a Black teacher during elementary school (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). Exposure to a Black teacher during grades 3-5 reduced the likelihood of dropping out of school for Black students, especially for Black males from low-income backgrounds (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017). Black and Hispanic students are recommended at higher rates for gifted education in schools where there is a significant presence of Black teachers and Black principals (Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern, 2017). Similarly, Rocha & Hawes (2009) described lower incidences of special education referrals in schools that employed a large number of Black and Hispanic teachers. Research attests that the academic success of minority students is

dependent upon consistent exposure to culturally competent teachers who are equipped with the skills and lived experiences to help them navigate an educational system that was not designed with their educational, emotional, or cultural needs in mind (Henfield & Washington, 2012).

Black College Students Attending Predominantly White Institutions

Kuh and Whitt (1998) and Museus (2008) described campus culture as the core values, norms, practices, and beliefs that exist within an institution and inform behaviors. The cultural norms and practices at predominantly White institutions evolved without consideration of the needs of Blacks and other minorities who have only gained access within the past 57 years (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Harper, 2013). As a result, cultural and minority perspectives are absent at many predominantly White institutions where traditional mainstream culture and systems remain dominant (Jackson, 2015; Museus & Harris, n.d).

Research affirms that race has an influence on the experiences of students of color on college campuses which affect them psychologically, mentally, and academically (Greer & Brown, 2011; Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Mattanah, 2016). Cole and Jacob Arriola (2007) suggested that all students encounter issues with socially and developmentally adjusting to college. However, Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, and Green (2004) and Fischer (2009) found that Black students who attend predominantly White institutions are confronted with different concerns than their White peers. Black college students balance their racial identity while also adjusting to institutional values. Likewise, Black students who attend

predominantly White institutions report that they do not feel integrated into the campus culture. These feelings contrast their Black peers who attend historically Black institutions and felt more connected to the campus community and institution (Harper, 2004; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Mattanah, 2016).

Although 83.7% of bachelor's degrees earned by Black college students were conferred at predominantly White institutions, Black college students demonstrated the highest levels of discontent and dissatisfaction among college students across the United States (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Villalpando, 2003). Harper and Hurtado's (2007) research posited that social, academic, and cultural integration factors contribute to the disparity in the number of Black students who graduate from institutions of higher education in comparison to their White peers. The disparities that exist in the graduation rates of Black college students and their peers, coupled with postsecondary dissatisfaction expressed by Black students who attend predominantly White institutions suggests the need for more inclusive and supportive environments for Black college students to thrive academically and socially (Von Robertson & Chaney, 2015). Research exploring the experiences of Black college students who attend predominantly White colleges demonstrates that they experience more stress than their Black peers who attend historically Black institutions (Greer & Brown, 2011).

The same unwelcoming environments that Black students encountered after integrating into predominantly White higher education settings remain prevalent on

predominantly White campuses across the United States (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jackson, 2001; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Contemporary literature affirms that although present-day Black and minority students have gained access to the post-secondary setting they reflect similar feelings of separation, invisibility, isolation, disengagement, alienation, hostility, stereotyping, discrimination, limited exposure to other minority peers, limited exposure to faculty of color, low expectations held by peers and faculty, and tokenism that were previously expressed by college students pre-integration (Allen, 1992; Bentley-Edwards & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Harper, 2013; Mattanah, 2016, Reynolds, Sneva, Beechler, 2010; Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015).

Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) used a grounded theory approach to learn about the institutional racial climate and microaggressions experienced by 34 Black college students who attended three elite and predominantly White public and private Research 1 institutions. Study participants reported feelings of invisibility, lack of access to curriculum representative of diverse cultures, and distorted views of Blacks presented in course material (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Participants also emphasized low academic expectations held by faculty and feelings of isolation (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Although residing on campus in residence halls is viewed as beneficial for college students, Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012) identified frequent racial microaggressions that confronted Black students as on-campus residents. Undergraduate and graduate students revealed microaggressions connected with

housing staff and their peers. Black and minority students were the subject of racial jokes, racially charged comments, and written racial slurs. Black college students who lived on campus resided in segregated spaces, reported unequal treatment by residence hall staff, denial and minimization of their experiences.

Findings from Wright's (2008) study matched prior studies regarding the expectation of Black students to speak on behalf of the race. Participants in Wright's study were confronted with adverse experiences off campus and experienced negative interactions with law enforcement (Byrd & Singh, 2014; Harper, 2013; Wright, 2008). Like other studies that explored the experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions, participants in Wright's study highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity training for faculty. The participants identified their involvement on campus as a source of empowerment. One contrast in Wright's study from other studies was an emphasis on the experiences of Black students at predominantly White institutions in Appalachia (Wright, 2008).

Blake's (2011) qualitative study included 17 Black college students who attended a predominantly White institution. Findings from Blake's study were consistent with prior studies which highlighted feelings of isolation among Black college students and experiences with racial profiling by campus security. However, Blake's study extended prior research by identifying supports that the participants used to achieve success despite their negative experiences. Although the students in Blake's study identified family and campus-based services as coping and support mechanisms the participants did not perceive Academic Advisors as beneficial

(Blake, 2011). Similarly, Von Robertson and Chaney (2015) used qualitative interviews to explore the lived experiences of 12 Black male college students at a predominantly White institution in the South. The participants revealed experiences with verbal abuse, racial stereotyping, devaluing of culture, lack of curriculum reflective of minorities and underrepresented populations, and lack of access to faculty mentors.

Garrett-Lewis (2012) examined the postsecondary experiences of 12 Black college students at a predominantly White institution. Findings supported previous research and attested to the need for more diversity among faculty, more diverse curriculum, and the importance of involvement in student clubs and organizations for Black college students. Garrett-Lewis found that Black college students felt the need to assimilate into mainstream culture, even though their assimilation devalued their own culture (Museus, 2008). Participants described misconceptions about their academic ability and their likelihood to succeed as college students. These findings were similar to research completed by Harper (2013) who found that some White students and faculty discount the aptitude of Black students and credit Affirmative Action and athleticism with the admittance of Black students instead of academic ability (Garrett-Lewis, 2012). Although the participants acknowledged diversity at the study site, they reported feeling as if they were not a part of the campus community and solely a number to fill a quota (Garrett-Lewis, 2012).

Laufer (2012) examined silencing among 15 Black college students at a predominantly White institution. Feedback from the participants described course

material as being predominantly Eurocentric. The participants also perceived their course material to devalue minorities and felt as if they were stereotyped as angry. In addition, the study participants expressed feelings of intimidation. In response, they spoke out to challenge discrimination but also engaged in silence to prevent judgment from peers. Participants sought refuge in majors that provided self-affirmation and by joining student organizations. Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, and Bylsma (as cited in Greer & Brown, 2011) also found that Black college students attending predominantly White institutions used coping strategies such as directly confronting offenders, seeking social supports, and ignoring discriminatory acts as survival strategies. Laufer's findings regarding the influence that participation in student clubs and organization have on Black college students supported research conducted by Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) and Harper (2013) who identified counter-spaces such as student clubs and organizations, membership in Black fraternities and sororities, and peer groups as ways that Black college students countered and challenged deficit thinking about minorities. Counter-spaces were used in social and academic settings as a place to share and validate experiences (Solórzano et al., 2000).

A variety of strategies are used by Black students to empower themselves in toxic environments. Black students who experience race-related stressors independently process events, maintain high grades, engage in self-determination, discuss acts of discrimination with others, and increase their work ethic to disprove negative stereotypes (Griffith, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Lewis

& Mckissic ,2010; Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2014). Fleming (as cited in Greer & Brown, 2011) revealed that Black college students at predominantly White institutions also used denial and avoidance to cope. In contrast, Black students at historically Black institutions used problem-oriented strategies and sought refuge in spiritually oriented outlets as coping mechanisms to address problems (Greer & Brown, 2011). Overwhelmingly, existing literature confirms that Black and minority students routinely engage in coping strategies to overcome microaggressions, racism, and to navigate through the postsecondary setting at predominantly White institutions. Relief is found in participating in student-initiated ethnic organizations and through counter-spaces where feelings of marginalization are validated. These opportunities promote cross-cultural communication with similar peers. In addition, Black college students identified ethnically-centered organizations as a place to develop a sense of belonging, express one's identity, and promote cultural awareness.

The Experiences of Black Students in Teacher Education Programs

Fewer college students are pursuing teacher education (Barth, Dillon, Hull, & Higgins, 2016). Brown (2014) and Milner, Pearman, McGee (as cited in Sleeter, 2013), and Villegas and Lucas (2002) discussed the challenges that teachers of color experience while enrolled in teacher education programs at predominantly White institutions. These obstacles included marginalization, isolation and alienation, lack of access to programs that incorporate the cultural assets and knowledge of minorities, the absence of culturally diverse and relevant material, and limited representation of Black teacher educators. Research attests that Black teacher

education majors who attend predominantly White institutions of higher education express feelings of hopelessness as they are confronted with microaggressions by peers and faculty while they navigate through their post-secondary education.

DeSutter (2013) described the otherness that Blacks and other minorities experience in teacher preparation programs, they either assimilate through their silence or face judgment when voicing their opinions.

Matias, Nishi, and Sarcedo (2017) identified schools as contributors to the racial hierarchy that persists in the United States and discussed the Whiteness that persists in teacher preparation programs, pre-service teacher demographics, teacher educators, administrators and mentors, and curriculum (Agee, 2004; Hayes & Juarez, 2012; Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo, 2017). A recurring concern for new teachers is the limited diversity and cultural competency training that they receive during their preparation (Barnes, 2006; Batchelder, 2008; Blackwell, Futrell, & Imig, 2003; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Siwatu, 2011). Siwatu (2011) pointed out that some teachers may exit their teacher preparation program without ever having exposure to experiences that incorporate culturally responsive teaching. Sleeter (2016) found that some teacher preparation programs marginalized multicultural curriculum and coursework designed to teach diverse populations by only teaching a few courses in multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, teaching English language learners, or social justice teaching (Sleeter, 2016). Although some programs are increasing their focus on areas such as urban education, an overemphasis on testing has also caused the removal of social and racial justice coursework from teacher education programs

(Sleeter, 2008). Requirements to reduce credit hours in online and alternative teacher education preparation programs have also caused the removal of diversity courses from teacher education preparation programs (Sleeter, 2008). Ultimately, though teacher education preparation programs discuss the concept of inclusion, they fail to prepare pre-service teachers to address obstacles that may prevent inclusion when they begin to teach (Booth, Nes, & Stromstad, 2003).

Gist's (2017) study revealed that although pre-service teachers desire to be taught by faculty who represent cultural and linguistic diversity, Black students have limited access to such faculty at predominantly White institutions. Feedback from Gist's study also found that minorities do not feel free to participate in classroom discussions due to the excessive need to explain themselves (Gist, 2017). Likewise, three themes arose in a qualitative study conducted by Amos concerning interactions between minority and White pre-service teachers enrolled in a multicultural education course. Study participants revealed frustration, desolation, and fear (Amos, 2016). The participants described feelings of frustration regarding the insensitivity that their White peers held about race and ethnicity. Moreover, the participants expressed feelings of despair in response to the naiveté expressed by their peers. The participants conveyed feelings of ostracism, and retaliation from peers if they reprovved their opinions. The study revealed that the participants engaged in silence in response to feeling dominated and powerless by their peers (Amos, 2016). Like other studies, the study participants felt that their teacher education program's design

allowed the voices of White teacher candidates to overpower that of minority teacher candidates.

Some progress has been made in providing postsecondary access to underrepresented populations (Ortiz-Frontera, 2013). However, the shortage of Black teachers in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms across the United States suggests that barriers and challenges still exist for Blacks who desire to become certified teachers. These barriers inhibit the successful completion of teacher preparation programs and the eventual certification of minorities, which directly contributes to the shortage of Black teachers.

Critical Race Theory

Kohli (2008), Picower and Kohli (2017), and Carter and Goodwin (as cited in Huber, 2008) described race as a social construct that is systemically used to include or exclude segments of the population from equally participating in society, equally accessing resources, and from engaging in human rights. Bell (1980), West and Morrison (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998), and Ladson-Billings (2013) affirmed the relevance of race and the social prominence that it holds within contemporary society. Critical Race Theory examines race and the manner that race intersects with other forms of marginalization (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Huber, 2008; Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001).

Critical Race Theory expanded upon the work of radical feminists by investigating power and social roles. Similar to the Civil Rights Movement, historical transgressions and group empowerment are focused upon in Critical Race Theory

(Crichlow & Visano, 2008; Stefancic & Delgado, 2001). Critical Race Theory challenges research paradigms that are deeply grounded in the historical, cultural, and social experiences of dominant society (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). Moreover, Lincoln (as cited in Yosso et al., 2001) highlighted Critical Race Theory as a methodology that intentionally seeks to learn about the marginalization and oppression experienced by underrepresented populations.

In addition to Critical Legal Studies, several other movements such as Radical feminism, European philosophers, American Radicalists, and the Black Power and Chicano movements influenced Critical Race Theory (Stefancic & Delgado, 2001). Critical Race Theory includes several basic tenets. These principles include permanence of race, interest convergence, Whiteness as property, the use of counter stories as a way to challenge master narrative, and the critique of liberalism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Though the tenets differ, they are interconnected (Hirald, 2010). The permanence of race tenet describes racism as a standard and normal practice within the social order that exists within the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003). Interest convergence suggests that members of the dominant society are only interested in topics surrounding race and social justice when they can be benefitted. The Whiteness as property tenet describes how through the ownership of property, Whites have been afforded the opportunity to fully participate in society. Moreover, the Whiteness as property tenet describes how dominant society has created the rules that exclude segments of the population from fully engaging in rights such as education (Harris, 1995). Harris

(1993) described the enslavement of Blacks and illegal acquisition of land owned by Native Americans as two examples associated with the Whiteness as property tenet. Ladson-Billings (1998) and Ladson-Billings (2013) identified storytelling as a historical art form that helps to understand, develop feelings about, and interpret the lived experiences of others. Delgado & Stefancic (2000) wrote that American society has failed to acknowledge racism properly and instead promotes color-blindness. Colorblindness hides the power and self-interest associated with changing policies, and privilege held by members of the dominant society (Solórzano, 1997).

Counterstories provide a scholarly approach in giving voice to marginalized populations, validating thoughts, and reproaching stories created by mainstream and dominant points of view (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). Counter stories are an essential means of challenging racial dominance. They demonstrate how marginalized populations navigate through and overcome societal structures (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory recognizes and legitimizes the power that experiential knowledge gathered through stories and the lived experiences gives to individuals whose voices have been missing (Dixson, 2006). Delgado Bernal and Solórzano (as cited in Huber, 2008) acknowledged the usefulness of counter stories in building community, challenging wisdom, highlighting the potential of marginalized populations by identifying possibilities and teaching through the stories and the realities of the oppressed.

Critical Race Theory in Education

Woodson, Freire, and hooks (as cited in Kohli, 2008) suggested that our education system is based on mainstream society's ideas and promotes oppression, dominance, and generates feelings of inferiority among underrepresented minorities. Critical Race Theory in Education emerged in 1994 as a more aggressive approach in examining the inequities and recurring patterns of marginalization in education (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, and Solórzano (2001) identified several basic themes that focus the work of Critical Race Theory in Education which include permanency of race and racism in education, challenging dominant ideology, a strong commitment to social justice, the significance of experiential knowledge, and the strengths associated with using an interdisciplinary perspective. Critical Race Theory acknowledges the prevalence and historically rooted nature of racism in the United States. However, Critical Race Theory also focuses on other aspects of subordination that promote marginalization (Yosso et al., 2001). Critical Race Theory identifies and challenges systems that promote the self-interest of mainstream society and promote power and privilege among dominant groups. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) recognized Critical Race Theory as a means of empowerment in ending subordination through its commitment to social justice. Stories are used to describe the lived experiences of underrepresented populations and to counter the stories told by mainstream society about the educational experiences of marginalized people. Parker and Villalpando (as cited in Hiraldo, 2010) explained that Critical Race Theory reveals factors that are

taken for granted when topics such as race and privilege are discussed. Hiraldo (2010) wrote that for progress to be made in racial equality in higher education it is essential that campus leadership examine how the needs of marginalized populations are incorporated in the campus experience in areas such as curriculum, initiatives to enhance diversity, and institutional policies. Hiraldo also suggested that applying the counter story tenet of Critical Race Theory in higher education affords minority faculty, staff, and students an opportunity to share insight into their personal experiences with marginalization. Regarding permanence of race in higher education, Hiraldo prompted higher education institutions to review their procedures and structures to determine whether they encourage marginalization. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that reality is created socially. Stories are a means of self-preservation for marginalized populations. The authors posited that exchanging stories is mutually beneficial for the teller and listener in understanding culture from more than one point of view. Counter stories are also an essential means of challenging racial dominance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1995). Fernandez (as cited in Love, 2005) pointed out that Critical Race Theory aims to cease the use of race in revising the future of underrepresented populations. Moreover, researchers such as Solórzano and Yosso (2002), Dixson and Rousseau (2006), and Ledesma and Calderon (2015) posited that Critical Race Theory confronts, challenges, and exposes the deficit point of view that exists in education regarding Blacks and other marginalized populations. Ultimately, Critical Race Theory challenges aspects of the

education that sustain subordination among individuals who differ ethnically and racially (Huber, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study described the personal accounts of six Black teachers who participated in a teacher preparation program at Morehead State University, their experiences, and the factors that contributed to their success. Historical hindrances that inhibit Black college students from graduating, the rising numbers of minority students entering the public education academic setting, and the shortage of Black teachers across the United States served as motivation for this study. This research study is intended to contribute to existing literature regarding the preparation of Black teachers. This chapter describes the methodological design, research questions, participant selection, instrumentation, and methods used to collect data. Additional topics explored in this chapter include ethical considerations, a discussion concerning the analysis of data retrieved from interviews, and acknowledgment of the researcher's bias.

Methodological Design

In qualitative research, a small sample population of individuals who can assist a researcher in understanding social situations and phenomenon, interactions, and how people make sense of their experiences is sought (Creswell, 2014; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological qualitative design was used to collect information in an open-ended, descriptive, and exploratory format (Creswell, 2014; Gay et al., 2009; Padgett, 2008). A phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to focus on the unique and individual experiences of the

participants through in-depth interviews, using the exact words of the participants to describe the factors that contribute to Black teacher shortages (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

This study explored the factors that facilitated program completion and the attainment of initial teacher certification among Black teachers who attended Morehead State University as undergraduate students. Two questions guided the study:

1. How do Black alumni of Morehead State University's teacher preparation program describe their experiences?
2. What factors sustained Black teachers during their pre-service teaching experience at Morehead State University?

Site Selection and Site Introduction

Morehead State University (MSU) was ideal because as a four-time graduate of the site the researcher understands the campus culture and campus climate of the institution. In addition, MSU has focused funding and other strategic efforts on the recruitment and retention of minority students. The researcher has an interest in understanding how the recruitment and retention efforts have supported the increase of Black teacher education majors in earning initial certification.

Founded in 1887, Morehead State University grants certificates, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctorate degrees. Since the 1950s Morehead State University has been at the forefront of racial integration within higher education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky (Morehead State University, 2017).

According to Flatt (1999) and Morehead State University (n.d.), the university was the first state institution in Kentucky to integrate its classrooms, faculty, scholarships, athletics, student government, and residence halls. The rural and predominantly White institution was an ideal site due to ease of access to participants, the University's commitment to diversity, and institutional type.

At present, the research site has an enrollment of 11,000 students. Underrepresented minorities represent seven percent of the student population and Black students account for three percent of the total student enrollment. The research site has a 65% retention rate for first-time first-year students and a 58% retention rate for students who represent underrepresented populations. The average ACT score is 22.4 (Tison, Baldwin, Johnson, Murphy, & Purnell, 2016).

The Participants

Black teachers who earned initial teacher certification as undergraduate students at Morehead State University were the target population for the study. Purposeful sampling and snowballing were used to identify potential study participants. Purposeful sampling consists of identifying individuals and research sites that can intentionally assist in understanding a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The use of snowballing helped to gain insight into additional participants from study participants, faculty, staff, and administrators (Creswell, 2014; Gay et al., 2009; Patton, 1990).

After approval was received from the Morehead State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) an email was sent to the Alumni Association requesting a list of

Black alumni from 2008 to 2018. The researcher also contacted the institution's Chief Diversity Officer and former faculty to obtain the names of potential study participants. Once identified, study participants received a letter of introduction (Appendix A).

Black teachers who earned initial teacher certification as undergraduate students at Morehead State University were the target population for the study. Ideally, the researcher sought to interview a minimum of ten participants. Time constraints, participant willingness, and identifying individuals who met the criteria resulted in fewer than ten participants. To participate in the research study the participant must:

- 1) Identify as a person of African descent,
- 2) Be a graduate of Morehead State University,
- 3) Earned initial certification as an undergraduate student, and
- 4) Voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

Before participating in an interview, study participants received and signed an electronic version of the consent form (Appendix B). The consent form outlined the expectations of the researcher, time commitments, and the ability to cease participation without penalty. The participants were given five business days to return the consent form. Each participant received an electronic copy of their signed consent form and a copy of the interview questions. After returning the signed consent form, the participants were asked to complete and return a short demographic

survey (Appendix C). Data collected from the demographic survey provided descriptive statistics and additional information about years of teaching experience and types of teaching experience. Data from the demographic survey and interview protocol offered an opportunity to paint a different picture of Black teacher education majors, while also countering existing narrative and literature that frames Blacks as disinterested in teaching or unable to successfully achieve certification (Haddix, 2017). To collect data the participants participated in semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted a pilot interview to determine if any aspects of the interview protocol or procedures needed to be redesigned (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Minor grammatical edits were made to the interview protocol. The pilot interview adhered to the same procedures as the official research study. The same security measures were adhered to as far as securing documents and providing a pseudonym to the participant in the pilot interview. The interview protocol (Appendix D) consisted of eight questions vetted by higher education professionals who hold doctorate degrees.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (as cited by Creswell, 2014) used terms such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility to describe the accuracy and validity of study findings (Creswell, 2014). Creswell identified triangulation, member checking, the use of rich description, acknowledging researcher bias, presenting discrepant information, peer debriefing, and the use of an external auditor as strategies to assure reliability (Creswell, 2014). For this study, triangulation was used to validate data

and identify themes based on participant responses. Member checking was used to provide participants with an opportunity to review the collected data for accuracy. The researcher also acknowledged personal biases.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell stressed the imperativeness of protecting participants during all phases of research (Creswell, 2014). Since this research study included feedback from human participants it was essential to obtain consent, assure confidentiality during all phases of the study, and gain permission from the Morehead State University Institutional Review Board (Creswell, 2014).

Each participant received a consent form (Appendix B). The consent form outlined the conditions of the study. The participants were reminded that they could cease participation at any time without penalty. All documents and electronic recordings were password protected on the personal computer of the researcher to maintain confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The pseudonym appears in all transcriptions and the final published capstone project.

Data Collection

Upon approval from the Morehead State University Institutional Review Board the researcher identified prospective study participants. Individuals who met the required criteria received an introductory letter (Appendix A). The letter provided details about the study and an invitation to participate. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) to conduct interviews. Due to geographic restrictions, interviews were conducted by phone and recorded using WebEx. The

researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim. Member checks were used to check the accuracy of the interview transcriptions, requested changes were made. The interviews were designed to last approximately one hour. The questions explored the participants' perceptions of their experiences as Black teacher education majors at Morehead State University. Data analysis and the interpretation of data are two critical aspects of the qualitative research process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). In qualitative research, data analysis is an inductive and continuous process (Gay, et al., 2009). Figure 1 outlines the data analysis method used. The researcher transcribed and coded responses verbatim to identify recurring themes and ideas.

Data Analysis

Figure 1 describes the data analysis process.

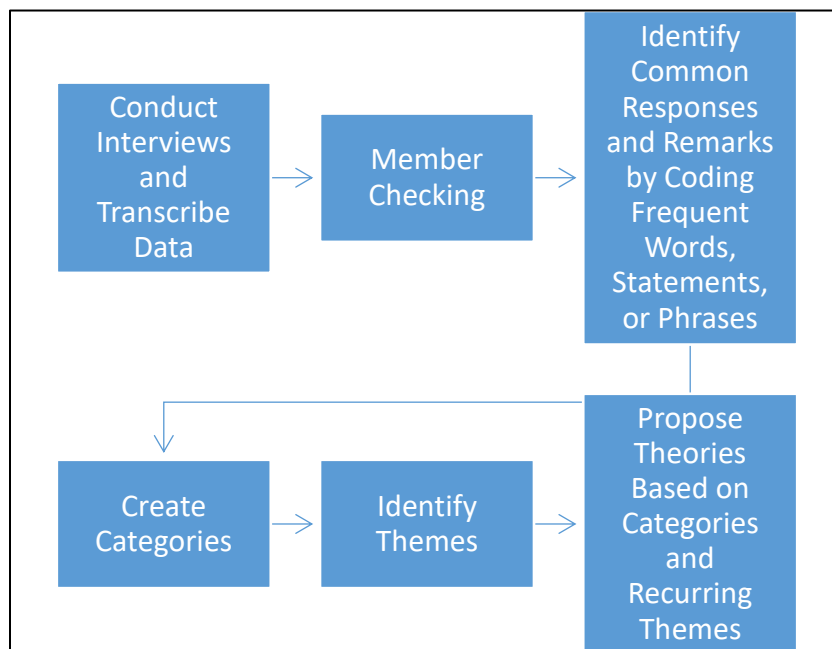


Figure 1. Data analysis process

Chapter Summary

This study was designed to gain insight into the experiences of six Black certified teachers regarding their experiences as undergraduate students at Morehead State University. A qualitative methodology was used and the study was approved by the Morehead State University IRB. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect data. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed to identify recurring themes. Chapter three summarized the research methods and processes used to conduct the study. The chapter also provided a description of the study design, an overview of the qualitative research methods used to collect data, and the benefits of using a qualitative phenomenological design to examine how various aspects of the college experience affect the postsecondary graduation of Black teacher education majors.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY FINDINGS

Research suggests that the presence of minority students is continuing to rise in America's K-12 classrooms. However, the presence of minority teachers does not mirror minority student enrollment. This qualitative research study examined the experiences of Black teachers who pursued teacher education at Morehead State University and the factors that contributed to their success. This information is vital in improving upon the experiences of future Black teacher education majors and increasing the number Black and minority teachers who enter classrooms in the United States. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black alumni of Morehead State University's teacher preparation program describe their experiences?
2. What factors sustained Black teachers during their pre-service teaching experience at Morehead State University?

This chapter introduces the six participants and provides an analysis of the data gathered through semi-structured interviews and a demographic survey. Findings from the study support prior research which similarly explored the experiences of Black teacher education majors at predominantly White institutions. Findings from the current study may assist higher education professionals in understanding the experiences of underrepresented populations so that services and policy changes can be implemented to enhance the postsecondary experiences of all underrepresented college students.

Though most of the participants described obstacles connected to their experiences as teacher education majors, each participant persevered and achieved certification.

Analysis of Data

Accurately presenting the perspectives of the participants was essential based on the researcher's close connection to the research site as a former student and staff member. After conducting each interview, the data were transcribed. A typed copy of the transcription was shared with each participant. After receiving permission from each participant to use an approved version of the transcription, each interview was listened to twice. Notes of frequent statements were written on printed copies of the transcriptions. Each transcript was reviewed a second time for content that explicitly described the lived experiences of the participants and answered the research questions. During the second review themes were identified based on recurring statements made by the participants. Major themes and prominent experiences were ideas reflected by at least three participants (50%).

The Participants

The researcher obtained a list of Black graduates who attended Morehead State University from 2008 through 2018. The list included the name, personal email address, and degree type of the prospective participant. The researcher filtered the list to include only individuals who had graduated with undergraduate credentials. From the list of 55 potential participants the researcher identified 15 individuals who possibly met the study criteria. The researcher contacted prospective participants

through email and private messaging using social media outlets. The researcher also recruited participants through peers employed at the research site and from study participants who were familiar with other prospective contributors.

Due to only having access to a small sample population, the researcher expanded the initial period of ten years of attendance and considered individuals who graduated from the institution within the past 14 years. Each participant received an electronic letter of introduction and was required to sign and return an electronic consent form. Once a signed consent form was received, the participant set an interview date and time. Participants received instructions on how to access WebEx and a short demographic survey by electronic mail. Nine of the fifteen individuals agreed to participate in the study. Only six individuals submitted consent forms and followed through with an interview. Before each interview, the researcher answered questions related to the study. Interviews occurred over a two-week period during March 2018. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. The author used the names of Black faculty and staff mentioned during the interviews to create pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were also used to protect the identity of the faculty and staff mentioned in the interviews.

The demographic survey revealed that two participants (33%) are certified in Elementary Education, two participants are certified at the Middle School level (33%), and two participants are certified at the High School level (33%). The Middle School teachers are certified in Math and Social Studies and Math and Science. The High School teachers are certified in Music Education and Business Education. Five

participants self-identified as female (83%). The average age of the participants is 38. The participants have taught an average of five years. The shortest length of teaching experience is three years and the longest length of teaching experience is 14 years. Five participants (83%) declared education as a major upon entrance into the college. Each participant gained admission into the teacher education program during their initial attempt. Four participants (67%) were required to retake the Praxis certification test more than once in their content area. The content areas included math, music concepts and processes, and elementary content. Two participants (33%) completed student teaching in an urban setting. Table 1 provides details about the participants including years of teaching experience, level, content area, and setting.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Teaching Experience (years)	Certification Level	Content Area	Setting
Peggy	-	P-5	Elementary Education	-
Ernestine	7	Middle School	Social Studies Math	Rural Urban
Francene	9	P-5	Elementary Education	Rural
Vincent	3	High School	Music Education	Rural
Clarenda	6	Middle School	Math Science	Rural
Ritta	14	High School	Business Education	Urban

Meet the Participants

Francene

Francene is a Counselor at a rural central Kentucky High school and achieved initial certification in elementary education. Before becoming a school counselor Francene taught in the same district for nine years. Francene is in her fourth year as a school counselor. Francene attended Morehead State University from 2000 to 2004. When describing her experience, Francene stated, “It was a pretty good experience. I met a lot of great people, had a lot of great professors, and learned a lot. It was just an overall wonderful experience for me.”

Francene is the only participant who indicated that she initially planned to attend a historically Black institution (Kentucky State University). While enrolled at Morehead State University, Francene was involved in a historically Black sorority, a teacher’s Honor Society, and the Black Gospel Ensemble. Francene recalled,

I had plans to go to Kentucky State University after I graduated high school. I was told about the Minority Teacher Education Program and Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention (MERR) scholarship that was offered. Basically, students would have to teach in Kentucky for the same amount of years that they received the scholarship to repay it. At the time that I learned about it, I really wasn't interested. But my then boyfriend, now husband, was going to Morehead. His mother suggested that I also attend Morehead State University. I am so glad that I did.

Peggy

Although Peggy achieved certification in elementary education Peggy has not taught at the K-12 level. Peggy is currently a full-time graduate student and has taught at the post-secondary level in a rural setting in Kentucky. Peggy is one of two participants who had prior college credit before being admitted to the research site.

Peggy recalled,

Well, at Morehead State University I had probably most positives to be general about it. I did have a few negative that kind of set me back. It is almost like a football player charging at you, knocking you back some yards. Well, that's the way I felt. It was positive and then all of a sudden, I felt like I was hit with a ton of bricks to knock me back some.

While enrolled at the institution Peggy was involved in three Honor Societies.

When asked what attracted her to the institution Peggy recalled,

A colleague of mine or I should really say somebody that I just knew attended Morehead State University. They had a positive experience there and thought I might like go. I had only attended at that time junior colleges or two-year colleges. So, he told me that it was good, and I thought that I would try it out.

Vincent

Vincent is working on a second graduate degree and plans to pursue a doctorate degree in the future. Prior to becoming a full-time graduate student, Vincent taught Music Theory and other related music courses at a rural high school in North Carolina. Vincent was involved in the Morehead State University Black Gospel

Ensemble. Vincent also helped to recruit other minority students through the institution's Diversity Days, an event sponsored by the Office. Vincent recalled,

Originally, I went to Morehead State University for a specific teacher. The degree program that I was a part of was Music Education and the person that I wanted to study with was the head of percussion studies. The teacher education program was almost a bonus, with my first intent of studying with Mr. Lamont. My percussion instructor in high school was also a student of Oscar's from when Oscar first got to Morehead State University. When I was younger, I was slightly spiteful. My percussion instructor in high school told me that I would not survive the program and I just kind of went to prove him wrong. Like I said before, everything after that was a bonus. I learned so much from going through that program.

Vincent was the only participant who mentioned academic rigor as a factor in college choice. Vincent recalled,

The percussion program at that time was very rigorous. It required a lot of time and a lot of excellence. There was a lot of individual practice time where I spent time learning music. That included learning how to play many different instruments. Some of the instruments I had never seen and/or touched before. But coming from a high school mindset, you do not really understand the amount of time needed to perfect the level of playing that is expected at Morehead. So, that was the main thing. He was not sure if I truly understood what was necessary to accomplish that task.

Ernestine

Ernestine is a Middle School teacher in a rural eastern Kentucky school district. Ernestine teaches Math and Social Studies and has previous experience teaching in an urban district in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As an undergraduate student at Morehead State University, Ernestine was a member of a historically Black sorority and participated in intramurals. When asked why she chose to attend Morehead State University Ernestine recalled,

The main reason I attended Morehead State University was that it was within an hour of my family. My role model went to Morehead State. So, I figured I would be just like her. That's what got me to Morehead State, I wanted to be like Helen Miller. Growing up I never seen a Black teacher, let alone to have one in the classroom who really cared about me as a person and not just about my academics. I feel like I wanted to follow in her footsteps so that I could be that for someone else. I went into education just because she was who I idolized outside of my parents.

Teachers are instrumental in a student's self- belief about their future academic endeavors (Brown, 2006; Burgess & Greaves, 2013; Wang & Hughley, 2012; Weinstein, Marshall, Sharp, & Botkin, 1987). Ernestine's recollection attests that impressionable teachers teach us skills and lessons that remain with us throughout our personal and professional lives. These individuals challenge us to be and do our best, celebrate our accomplishments and offer important feedback and advice during times of hardship and indecision. Ernestine's feedback confirms that

teachers who represent diverse language, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds possess a variety of skills that contribute in positive ways to the education setting and success of Black students (Dee, 2004; Irvine, 2003; Kohli, 2009; Talbert-Johnson, 2001).

Clarenda

Clarenda teaches middle school in a rural eastern Kentucky school district. She is certified in Math and Science. As an undergraduate student Clarenda was involved in a historically Black sorority, the Black Gospel Ensemble, the Minority Leadership Caucus, Impact (a religious-based organization), and the institution's Future Teacher Recruitment program. When asked why she decided to attend Morehead State University Clarenda recalled,

Well, the main reason that I chose Morehead was because I was given a scholarship. So, that was one of the major factors. I didn't even have Morehead in mind, at first. But then, one of the representatives from Morehead came to the school and offered me a scholarship. So, that is the main reason I attended Morehead. It was a Black Achiever's scholarship and I also got the minority scholarship. I had both of those. I had one for full tuition and the other one was for like \$1,000.

Ritta

Ritta is a high school teacher in a large urban district and teaches Business classes. Ritta has taught for fourteen years. When asked about her decision to attend Morehead State University Ritta recalled, "They offered me a scholarship and it was a smaller university."

In summary, fifty percent of the participants attended the research site because of a scholarship opportunity. One participant mentioned geographic location as a factor in her decision to attend Morehead State University. Fifty percent of the participants attended the institution because of a relationship with an individual previously affiliated with the college. Two participants were transfer students. One participant completed general education core coursework at a Kentucky Community and Technical College and the other participant completed coursework as a joint venture with Morehead State. One participant has never taught at the K-12 level, two participants have experience teaching in an urban setting, one participant has out of state teaching experience, and five participants received the Minority Education Recruitment and Retention conversion scholarship. Three participants received instruction by a minority faculty member as an undergraduate student at Morehead State University.

Ernestine highlighted the influence of a former teacher, who served as a source of inspiration in her decision to become a teacher. Clarenda and Vincent reflected that their desire to teach was based on never being taught by a Black teacher and their desire to change this misfortune for future students. It was through reminiscing about his postsecondary experience that Vincent realized the impact of not being taught by a minority teacher. Ritta was the only participant who did not express either a sense of calling, the influence of a former teacher, or a desire to diversify the field as a reason for her decision to enter the field. Table 2 presents the participants' reasons for entering the teaching profession.

Table 2
Reasons for Entering the Field

Participant	Calling	Prior Teacher	Diversify the Field
Peggy	X		
Ernestine	X	X	
Francene	X		
Vincent	X		X
Clarenda			X
Ritta	-	-	-
Sense of Calling			

Mattingly (as cited in Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012) highlighted the extensive roots that sense of calling has in the teaching profession. The author revealed that internal and external factors evoke a sense of calling and entrance into the field. Although the participants were not asked why they desired to become teachers, their decision to do so was expressed in their responses to other questions. While conducting the interviews three participants indicated that they were called to teach. This calling influenced their perseverance and persistence as evidenced in their responses.

Francene's Perspective

I think it's greater than Morehead State University. I feel like I am called to be a teacher and I am now called to be a Counselor for a High School. So, I think with a calling, you are led to certain places. (Francene)

Peggy's Perspective

To be honest, I prayed about it and I really felt like I was supposed to be a teacher. It goes back to my childhood and how I was treated. A lot of negative, some positive. A lot of negative. I decided I wanted to give back. I

know that sounds kind of odd. But, I wanted to give something to children that I didn't receive myself. I just felt all this time that I at least had an idea of what children who suffered in their education needed. The attention they needed from real teachers, not somebody who just decided they wanted to be a teacher. But, more like a calling. So for me, it was a calling. Something that I could not get out of my system. And I felt like I needed to do that. I did not know anyone who had graduated from Morehead State University in the education field. But, I just thought that I would try it. I had more of a positive feeling about it. So, I decided to go. I was very nervous, but I couldn't think of any other school that I wanted to go to. So, I just decided that I would just try Morehead State University. (Peggy)

Ernestine's Perspective

"I didn't really feel included in anything. But, I switched back to education because I knew that was my calling and that's what I would be most beneficial in the world doing" (Ernestine).

Making a Difference

Ernestine's Perspective

Because that's where Ms. Miller went to. Growing up I never saw a Black teacher, let alone to have one in the classroom who really cared about me as a person and not just about my academics. I feel like I wanted to follow in her footsteps so that I could be that for someone else. I went into education just because she was who I guess I idolized outside of my parents. (Ernestine)

Clarenda's Perspective

Well, growing up I never had any Black teachers. There was never anyone who looked like me. I always kind of knew I would be a teacher. When I was younger I would come home, I would have school again. (Clarenda)

Vincent's Perspective

The teachers in Morehead did a very nice job of making me aware of the world outside of Morehead and outside of what I am used to. I want to say that it was Dr. Centers. Me and her were talking about some music education things and she looked at me and said, "There aren't a lot of Black teachers in the world." I was like, "Yeah that is something that I have known for a long time." By the time that I was in high school, I think I had maybe had one African American teacher and they weren't even my teacher. They were somebody that I had met because of a club that I was in. It was just coming to that realization. I am working on my second graduate degree right now. This might not relate, but it seems similar to what you are asking. It didn't dawn on me that the field that I am in, I am working with the University Symphony. After one of the concerts, one of the Cello players walked up to me and she was like "this is so great". This is so awesome that you are conducting me. I have never been under the direction of a Black conductor. The thought of being a Black conductor never crossed my mind, never. In the past six to seven years that I have been working toward this goal, it has never crossed my mind. I just want to be a conductor. I just want to go spread music to the

world. It didn't click, how big of a responsibility that I have to complete this task. (Vincent)

General Education Coursework

A 2015 study consisting of 60 classroom observations at three community colleges revealed microaggressions committed by faculty in 30% of its classrooms (Suarez-Orozco, Casanova, Martin, Katsiaficas, Cuellar, Smith, & Dias, 2015). Suarez-Orozco et al. (2015) found that microaggressions caused the participants to disengage, use distracting behaviors, engage in silence, and confront the aggressor. Similarly, confronting the aggressor was a strategy used by Francene, Peggy, Clarendia, and Ernestine in the current study.

One of the sub-questions asked the participants to describe their experiences in their general education and teacher education courses. Table 3 provides a visual representation of the responses. Three participants mentioned that they had a negative experience associated with content. In addition, fifty percent of the participants mentioned lack of diversity and two participants experienced a negative interaction with faculty. Peggy, Ernestine, and Francene provided specific accounts of their negative interactions. Ernestine expressed that she felt "isolated" and "alone." These feelings mirrored experiences similar to those found in existing research.

Table 3
Perceptions of General Education Coursework

Participant	Negative Experience with Content	Negative Interaction with Faculty	Lack of Student Diversity in classes
Peggy	X	X	X
Ernestine	X	X	X
Francene	X		X
Vincent			
Clarenda			
Ritta			

Peggy's Account

At Morehead, I did have just a few teachers who I didn't have a good feeling about. I just thought it was an unpleasant experience. I wasn't the only one that had an unpleasant experience. I was a lot of times the only minority in my class. I was treated very well, to be honest with you. In most of them, I was treated really good. Just a few, that I had bad experiences with. I did take a Career Counseling class that I didn't have to take. But I was trying to make sure I took so many hours and the woman encouraged me to take the class.

After I got in the class she actually tried to expose me. She acted like she had some issues going on in her life and she did take it out on me in front of the whole class. The students stared at me a lot and I just stared at the walls. She did downgrade minorities. I had that happen in more than one class. In Sociology, there was a teacher who made sure he only showed pictures of minorities who were naked. He also did this with African people. He would

show videos of them naked as well. And I was beyond offended because that's not proper teaching. So, we were allowed to teach ourselves. I taught about my own culture. I'm not saying that some native people don't walk around naked, I'm sure maybe in the rainforest type areas and places like that. But, he showed that in general. "This is the way Native American people dress. This is the way African people dress." I was so insulted for both. It showed every inch of their bodies. I wouldn't watch, and I reported it. The people I reported it to were really upset, but nothing was done. I decided to do something myself by teaching about my own culture. It had nothing to do with nudity and I dressed in some apparel, the way that some people would dress. I decided to do that and teach it to the class. That was the way that I empowered myself. I felt like I'm going to teach it the right way. He actually received it very well and told me that he would recommend me for a teaching job. I was surprised, but he received it well. I think it was just his ignorance and I really don't know why he was allowed to teach that class. He said that he had traveled abroad and told us about his stories. It was rather insulting as well. He told it from his perspective and not actuality. He did say after I finished teaching he would gladly recommend me. He just told me when I need a job, just call him or notify him. But, I didn't do it because I felt like he was not the person that I trusted or that I felt was a good teacher. I felt like he needed to do more research and be more knowledgeable about people in general, instead of making a generalization. I didn't even think that he saw

the groups that he talked about. I think he just got a video. He said over and over that he had stayed with a certain group. He just emphasized on that, he used that to generalize, and I thought that was really poor teaching. I don't think that was good at all. I talked to some people about it, some teachers at Morehead State University about it. I was upset and they were upset for me. I don't know what they did. They may have told someone. But I don't know. I never really found out. (Peggy)

Ernestine's Account

They were fairly easy. I was the only Black face in a lot of my general classes and I did not expect that with there being a few others on campus. So, there were a lot of times that I felt alone and isolated in those classes. Especially, if it was like in a History class and they started talking about race. It was always like, "Ernestine, what's your opinion?" I always felt like in many of the classrooms that I always was the role model face for other Black students. But, the classes themselves were easy. Some of the professors themselves, they were just not nice. I think my least favorite experience was a two-hour science class. I wasn't sure if I wanted to do Science and Social Studies. It was actually a minority teacher that refused to help me throughout the entire two hours. We met two to three times a week, he refused to help me. I would raise my hand and he'd look through me and go help the next person beside me. I hated that class and I could not stand that man. Even though I ended up with an A in that class, he was the main reason that I didn't become a Science

teacher. I wanted to avoid him altogether because I assumed that all of the other Science teachers were that way. He didn't want to see a Black face go in that field and I felt like he purposefully would not assist me. To a point in class where I raised my hand and was like "Sir, why do you refuse to give me help?" He came and helped for one or two seconds, but that was it for the entire semester. (Ernestine)

Francene's Account

There was only one incident during my time at Morehead that I felt uncomfortable with the content that was being taught concerning African American males. I was very vocal with the Professor about it. It was a course in Social and Behavioral Sciences. The city of Morehead and Rowan County are not as diverse as other parts of Kentucky or the United States. I was very offended with the content that the Professor chose to teach. The content concerned African American males who lived alternative lifestyles. The African American males were being viewed as very weak, they were viewed as the lesser. I remember speaking to my grandparents about it. My grandparents being African American kept telling me to keep my mouth shut. But, that was not who I was. I was vocal with the Professor. One-on-one I let him know that I was very uncomfortable and did not appreciate how he was going about teaching that content. I felt like he heard me out, I don't remember any retaliation. (Francene)

Ernestine's reflection of being expected to speak for the race in her History courses, coupled with Francene and Peggy's experiences reflect frustrations expressed by Black students in prior research.

Vincent was the only participant who discussed the impact of his prior academic preparedness on his post-secondary experience. Vincent expressed the need to refamiliarize himself with content covered in high school. Vincent recalled,

I was very fortunate to have some really phenomenal professors in all my gen ed courses. There were difficulties in each one. It was material in a field that I really did not have experience in. I really was taking a lot of the gen ed courses to refamiliarize myself with some of it and at the same time learn something new. The challenges that came with those gen ed courses really were based on the material that I was not aware of or things that I thought I knew. I guess the hardest challenge was dissecting all of that new information and reworking the things that I thought already knew. I will say the hardest challenge for me was my math course. (Vincent)

Ritta's Account

"They were okay. Nothing too challenging or demanding" (Ritta).

Clarenda's Account

"I had a pretty good experience in all my general classes. All of the professors were pretty helpful anytime I needed help" (Clarenda).

Diversity in General Education Courses

Francene's Perspective

“In my general classes, I had more diversity. Obviously, because you have to get those classes done and there's a larger number of people in those classes. So, I had diversity there” (Francene).

Ernestine's Perspective

“I realized that with me being the only Black face in most of my classes, my professors knew my name after day one. That was a benefit” (Ernestine).

Peggy's Perspective

“A lot of times, I was the only minority in my class. There were very few times there were minorities in the classes I had” (Peggy).

When asked how the lack of diversity affected her, Francene described, I participated in community service events sponsored by the Greeks. I talked to other people from other campuses. My family uplifted me, I got involved with the African American events on campus that celebrated me. That was very encouraging. There were speakers who were alumni, who would come back for us to help us. They were instrumental.

Experiences in Teacher Preparation Courses

In addition to describing their experiences in their general education courses, the participants were asked to describe their experiences in their teacher preparation courses. Several themes emerged from the responses. A total of 67% of the participants commented on their limited exposure to ethnic or geographic diversity

during observations, student teaching, or in the curriculum. One participant offered several specific accounts of negative experiences during her student teaching experiences. Fifty percent of the participants reflected upon the limited peer diversity in their teacher education courses and negative experiences during observations.

Table 4 provides a visual representation of the responses.

Table 4
Perceptions of Teacher Preparation Coursework

Participant	Limited Exposure to Diverse Content or Observation Experiences	Negative Experience During Observations	Negative Experience During Student Teaching Experiences	Limited Diversity in Classes
Peggy		X	X	
Ernestine	X	X		X
Francene	X	X		X
Vincent	X			X
Clarenda	X			
Ritta				

Francene's Account

I was predominantly the only African American in most of my education classes. I do not remember if I had any other African Americans in my classes. It was great teachers and great learning, but I was a minority in those classes. (Francene)

Ernestine's Account

Most of the time in my classes I was one of two Black students. At most, there might be three. But, that was far between. I think the reason is that I had a weird component, it was Math and Social Studies. I did not do the usual

Math and Science or English and Social Studies. Some of the classes were educational. They taught me how to be a teacher. There were some of the classes that were supposed to help, but they didn't. For example, my diversity class didn't prepare me for diversity. When you would ask questions like, "How do I connect to the student that doesn't look like me?" they were unable to give real-life experience of how to connect. They were terrible, they were terrible, they did not prepare me. A lot of the activities were not real-life activities that a teacher would do or even assign to their students. (Ernestine)

Clarenda's Account

One of the things that I did not do that I would have liked to have done was more observations in more diverse communities. Most of my observations took place in Morehead, a rural area. I would have liked to go to urbanized areas. (Clarenda)

Peggy's Accounts

I went to a local elementary school where I was placed. I decided that I would visit the school before I started my student teaching and I went to meet the teacher. I wanted her to know who I was. The look that she gave me, her body gestures, and everything told me you're not welcome here. I just tried to overlook it because that is not the first time I have received those vibes. I tried to talk to her and it was difficult, and she did not encourage me in the least bit. I also went to the fourth-grade teacher. She shut the door in my face. She didn't even talk to me. She just shut the door in my face. So, I ended up

going to that school anyway to do my student teaching in the second grade. All while I was there, I overworked myself. I helped the teacher empty the garbage. I did whatever I could, aiming to please. But that was the wrong thing. She criticized my every effort. It didn't matter. I love to read. For an example, when I read to children I ask them questions and I read with excitement. That's the way I was raised when I was growing up. My mother read to us and I learned to do that from her. I learned to just have excitement in my voice, stop ever so often, ask questions and go on. So, she criticized me over that and then she turned around and did it herself. I had never seen her read to the students and do that. She was actually pretty harsh with the students. I just thought maybe that's the way they do here at this school. She was considered a top teacher. So, it didn't matter. And, she didn't like the fact that I tried to enunciate my words properly. For example, I said, "Oil." This little boy said, "It's not that, its ol." And, I said to him, "Ok, we have a different dialect. You have the dialect where you said ol (and I had to think about it) and I say oil and that's ok." I didn't tell him the proper way to say it was oil. And, the teacher put herself in between the student and myself and told me that I better be careful how I talked to her students. So that's just a few of many examples of what she did to me. I knew that when she met with my supervising teacher from Morehead State University, I could feel that she was slashing me. I would teach the class. She would tell me before she left, "I know that you can do this." So, I just taught the class. But I could feel

intuitively that she was slashing me. I found out later she was. That bad situation lasted all while I was in that class. Going to board meetings with her, staying until 9 o'clock every board meeting, having to go home, and sitting up until three o'clock in the morning. Crying, doing my homework and then getting up the next morning being there by 7:30 in the morning. I wouldn't tell her because she had told me that she was a wonderful teacher. "She is absolutely lovely." While she was telling me she was lovely, my intuition told me there's a problem. But I didn't say anything. So, I suffered through that. She took me in this room. At that point, I was close to tears. I was thinking am I going to fail, just because this woman wants me to. My supervising teacher was giving me a hard time for a while and then she felt that something wasn't right. I forgot to tell you that the second-grade teacher had the principal in on it and was telling the principal things. So, I had the principal and the second-grade teacher and I was at my wits end. I was at the end of the rope and I didn't want to quit. My teaching from my parents to be strong and to endure kicked in. I felt like I was barely hanging on because I did feel that she was trying to fail me. So, back to when my supervising teacher took me into a room. We had a meeting and at that point, I couldn't even look at her. Because the tears, they were coming and so she said, "What's going on here?" "I'm feeling it now," she said, "What's going on?" And the tears were flowing and she said to me, "I know, I'm not stupid. I know something's going on and you're not being treated right." I really felt

like I could say “Hallelujah!” I prayed hard that she could see that the teacher that she claimed was so beautiful, so wonderful was that way toward her. Did she ever think of how she might treat minorities? So being that I could talk to her, she allowed me to talk to her after she quit putting up that guard about the teacher being so wonderful. I just told so many things, just a few because so much had happened. And she said, “We have to get you out of here, we cannot keep you in this school.” So, when she had to talk to her supervisor, her supervisor did not treat me good. She said to me, “We can send you to another location.” My supervising teacher looked at me and she whispered, “That’s worse.” Her eyes got so big and she said, “They’re trying to fail you.” She saw it all. But it seemed like nothing was happening until I started praying for God to reveal to her what was going on. My supervisor’s supervisor was actually very mean to me. She told me that she thought that the reason that the teacher at the elementary school treated me bad was because I was talking about God. I didn’t feel comfortable to talk to her about much of anything. I tried. But I could feel the knife that I felt that she was stabbing at me. It was very difficult for me to talk to her like I should. My intuition was telling me that she was just out to get me, I could feel it. Sometimes when she scored me, she scored me 2 out of 4. It was really bad. At first, she gave me almost all 4’s and then it started going downhill. She tried to give me a 1 for the work ethic and I confronted her, and she raised the score. My supervisor didn’t like the way her supervisor was treating me. I

hadn't reported anything, she treated me horribly and wanted it to be my fault. I hadn't said much of anything in my defense. I realized that I had to defend myself. Before I left that day, my supervisor's supervisor continued to talk to me in a harsh manner. She told me if I was talking about God I needed to keep that outside. I just kind of braced myself and I left. I went home to pray. Before I even left the campus I knew what I had to do. I called and made an appointment. I told her, "This is who I am, I can't change it" and I said, "I was not talking about God." I didn't say, but I wanted to say that I didn't feel comfortable talking to her and was really just trying to do everything I could to talk to her. I felt like she didn't want me there, I could feel it. So, she just kind of acted like she was something. I know she was not afraid of me. Maybe she got some kind of revelation about the situation. I don't know. I got my A, but the A was hardly worth it. I was nervous. This went on and on and then, of course, I was transferred out of there. The sad thing about it was the school I transferred to repeated the same thing. The principal was absolutely lovely. I thought that's your opinion, do you ever research how students of any color have been treated when they have went to some of these schools? So, I went and did the best I could. I got my grade but can't say I was pleased there either. There was a woman principal there and I felt like I was in competition with her because I like to read. A lot of times people would come in and read and stuff like this. I liked to act too. My first degree, an AA was in Theater. And so, I did that. I loved doing it and I loved to

speak. It just kind of came natural for me. I felt like I was in another competition and I really didn't like that. I was there for the children. Did I make it out fine? Did someone take a grade from me? No, but I was made to suffer. (Peggy)

Vincent was the only participant who discussed the rigor of the teacher education program and the manner that his foundational courses helped to prepare him for future coursework.

Vincent's Account

The program itself got me to think a lot about what I really wanted to do and the work that was necessary to complete that. My first class was Foundations of Education. At first, I thought the class was extremely difficult. It was another one of those times that I didn't understand the amount of work necessary to do what I needed to do for that class. Out of all the things that I got out of that class, that's the one thing that stuck with me. It's the amount of work necessary to succeed. But it was just kind of that eye-opening moment, of this is the amount of work I have to put in to really succeed. (Vincent)

Observation Experiences

Francene's Account

I do remember going into some of the classrooms in Rowan County and everyone was nice. But, I remember getting certain looks. It could have been my imagination but in some cases, it made me feel uncomfortable. It was the

adults in the building. It was not all adults, just some of them. It was at the elementary level. (Francene)

Ernestine's Account

Whenever we would be sent to do observations in the surrounding counties like Rowan County Middle School or a local elementary school in a surrounding county I always felt out of place. Those teachers there never talked to me. It was just like sit down and get your hours. I wondered if they did that to all college students or was it just me. I didn't know if I was the only one that was going through it. It really did not benefit me to have observation hours in such as rural setting. I got hired in the city and it was a complete contrast to the experience that Morehead provided. Whenever there was downtime and the kids were working independently, I would ask them questions. I tried to initiate conversations with them and sometimes they would respond in detail. Sometimes, in short answers. I think my worst one was in a local rural district about 20 minutes away. (Ernestine)

Clarenda's Account

One of the things that I did not do that I would have liked to have done was more observations in more diverse communities. Most of my observations took place in Morehead, and it's a rural area, not an urban area. So, I would have liked to go to an urbanized area. (Clarenda)

Access to Diverse Faculty

Although campuses and universities claim to value diversity they have failed to provide students with adequate exposure to faculty of color. Black faculty represent only six percent of full-time faculty employed at colleges and universities (Kelly, Gayles, & Williams, 2017; United States Department of Education, 2017). As a result, African Americans and other underrepresented populations do not influence aspects of higher education such as curriculum and course design (Patton, McEwen, Rendón, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007). Madyun, Williams, McGee, and Milner (2013) discussed that Black faculty contribute in helping students to develop the skills necessary to communicate with people from other cultures. Faculty of color also expose students to the realities of other cultures. This knowledge assists students with the essential skills to participate in society as leaders and citizens (Bollinger, 2007; Madyun et al., 2013). The participants were asked if they received instruction from minority faculty and how the experience differed from being taught by a non-minority faculty member.

Table 5 describes recollections of interactions with diverse faculty. The participants were asked “Did you receive instruction by any minority faculty as a student at Morehead State University?” and “How did the experience of being taught by a minority faculty member differ from being taught by a non-minority faculty member?” Three participants indicated that they were not taught by a minority faculty member.

Table 5

Exposure and Experiences to Diverse Faculty and Staff

Participant	Taught by a minority faculty member	Support from a minority staff member	Negative interaction with a minority faculty/staff member	Empowerment because of interaction with a minority faculty member	Support from a nonminority faculty/staff member
Peggy		X			X
Ernestine	X	X	X	X	X
Francene	X	X		X	X
Vincent	X	X		X	X
Clarenda Ritta		X			

Francene, Ernestine and Vincent vividly recalled their interactions with minority faculty. Likewise, half of the participants mentioned feeling empowered because of their interaction with minority faculty and staff. Several themes emerged, these themes included connections based on similar experiences, feeling more comfortable, being able to let down their guard, seeing the possibility of future opportunities, being exposed to diverse experiences, a sense of encouragement, having a sense of support, having as a sounding board, providing introductions to other minority faculty and staff, and feeling valued.

Francene Reflected

I had a Military Science course where we learned to shoot weapons. I had an African American male instructor. I felt like he got me. I remember just being able to laugh and be comfortable. It was not that I did not feel like this

with other professors because I had great professors. But I remember being in a class with someone who could relate to me, who looked like me, and who had some of the same experiences as me. It made me appreciate him and it made me appreciate who I was. It is like I tell my students if you can't see it you can still be it. It was really hard at Morehead because I only saw it once. (Francene)

Ernestine Reflected

Yes, I had Dr. Hardin my first year. It was one of the very first required courses. The very basic teacher education class. That was the class that I got the most real-life experience in. We had a field trip to Louisville, we got to go to an inner-city school. He was able to pull back on his own recollection of being in the classroom. You could tell that he was still connected back to the classroom even though he was a professor. I believe that he truly listened to what I said and saw value in what I was saying. I remember in his classroom we had to write a philosophy of education and he left a note on my statement. It said, "You are going to be an excellent teacher, stay in the field." I just remember feeling pride that he saw that in me because the rest of them don't see that. But then he left. (Ernestine)

Vincent Reflected

Yes, there were three professors that I had that were minority professors. Dr. Sarah Travis, Dr. Ralph Gordon, and Dr. Winston. Dr. Gordon was actually a new music professor my freshman year at Morehead. He was my Music

Theory and Music Reading teacher. He was also the Director of the Black Gospel Ensemble and I was a member of that ensemble for three years. I believe I had Dr. Travis my sophomore year. She was my Communications professor. I was introduced to Dr. Winston through Dr. Travis. For me, they could relate to me better than other teachers could. My family is mostly from the South and there are a lot of those southern things that I just grew up with. I just had that southern slang and they understood that, without thinking about it. It was very easy to communicate my thoughts and ideas in their classes, without having to modify my speech to accommodate them. They just related to me on a personal level, where some of my other teachers didn't. A lot of it, I truly believe just comes from the fact that we were from similar cultures. It wasn't anything major, but they just understood me on a deeper level. Without me having to describe it to them. When I was there I had a lot of support. Even though I had Dr. Gordon and Dr. Travis, they in-turn introduced me to more people on campus. Cameron Hillman, the Chief Diversity Officer, was one. Martha Tapps, an Admissions Counselor, was another person that I was introduced to. I had a very huge support net there. (Vincent)

In addition to their discussion regarding the impact that minority faculty had on their experiences at Morehead State University, four participants recalled their experiences with Black staff. Although Ritta and Peggy were not taught by a minority faculty the participants pointed out the impact of the Minority Teacher Education Program Coordinator, a staff member in the Office of Financial Aid, and the Chief

Diversity Officer had on them. Though neither were faculty, they offered an additional layer of support. Vincent recalled his interactions with minority staff in the Office of Admissions and with the Chief Diversity Officer. Francene discussed the support and mentorship that two female Black female staff members provided in her adjustment and success in attending a predominantly White institution.

Peggy Reflected

One example that I will start out first is getting my financial aid. I went to get my financial aid and I had been receiving the amount that I needed to go to school there for each year. Well, I was assigned to a different person based on my last name. So, that's who I was assigned to go to and I had this dreadful feeling. She told me all I could have was three thousand something dollars and I told her "I can't go to Morehead State University on \$3,000 dollars." She said, "Well, I am sorry." I thought, I am right in the middle of my education and I can't go to school anymore. I did graduate Summa Cum Laude. I did keep a high GPA and none of that seemed to matter. She just told me three thousand something dollars. That was it. I went away thinking I'll have to transfer. There was a person of color who worked in the Financial Aid department and a peer talked to him. He said, "Tell her to come to me." When I went to him it was no big deal and I got my money. I couldn't understand what her problem was. Now, that was a negative one. It turned out positive because of the minority person who helped me. It turned out positive. (Peggy)

Ritta Reflected

Some of the resources I remember came from the Minority Teacher Education Program Coordinator. She offered some supports. I do remember we traveled together. She helped me find other financial support when I entered the teaching field. She was always available when I needed to talk to her. (Ritta)

Vincent Reflected

Martha Tapps worked in Admissions. I don't know if Morehead still does this, but when I was there they used to have Diversity Day. I met Martha through one of the Diversity Days. I was helping with Diversity Day. There were times when Martha would ask me and a couple of students of color to travel with her to recruit more students to Morehead State. I know there was one time where me and another African American student traveled to a high school in Louisville to recruit. It just so happened that one of the classes was an Orchestra class. She asked me to go because I was a music student. She wanted to relay to students the fact that we do have people of color in the music program. So, that was how I got connected with Martha. I really don't remember how I got in contact with Cameron, but he was another advocate for diversity on campus. I do remember that very clearly. But, I don't remember the exact instance that caused us to be connected. (Vincent)

Francene Reflected

“Ms. Lynne Wright and Ms. Cindy Murray. They were two individuals who stayed on me. It was just surviving and maintaining at a predominantly White institution” (Francene).

Frazier (2011) identified the benefits that non-minority faculty who are committed to diversity can have on setting the standard for the importance of diversity. The presence of non-minority supporters is essential as many Black and minority faculty become overwhelmed with adjusting to predominantly White institutions and have difficulty acclimating to the isolation and pressure to perform (Frazier, 2011). Peggy and Vincent were the only participants who specifically mentioned examples of support provided by non-minority faculty members.

According to Vincent,

The people in Morehead were very accepting on all accords. However, if I ran into an issue it wasn't something that was going on in Morehead. It was something more along the lines of if you are going into teaching you need to understand that this is the world. Those kinds of things. It was like you need to understand that you might walk into a teaching situation and you might be the only African American in the building. (Vincent)

According to Peggy,

There was a professor who was not my teacher, she was over a club that I was a member of. She saw me one day in the hall and I was trying to keep myself composed. I was right in the midst of it. She called my name and she said,

“Come here,” and I tried to look away. She put her arms around me and I could feel love. It was as though she was God sent and she said, “I want you to tell me what’s going on.” “Something is going on.” I didn’t want to tell her. I didn’t know who else to talk to. I didn’t know what else to do. I was afraid that someone would run and tell this one and that one. She said, “I am listening to you.” A feeling within me let me know that she was genuine. So, I told her what was going on. She said, “You know what, that’s their loss. That school will never receive another student teacher from Morehead State University.” All I could think to myself was who else had been here had a horrible experience and didn’t complete the program because of what they went through? So, it opened my eyes to how some minorities are treated.

(Peggy)

Francene described,

Each semester we would discuss the classes that I needed to take. My Advisor helped me to map my route. It was great for keeping me on track. It let me know what was to come next. It showed me the options that I had. It helped to guide me. I think it was great. (Francene)

Francene was the only participant who mentioned actively collaborating with an Academic Advisor.

The MERR Program

The participants were asked to describe the resources that existed to support Black teacher education majors at Morehead State University. A recurring theme that

five participants mentioned was the Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention program and scholarship. The participants had varying opinions regarding the scholarship, the program, and support. In 1992, the Kentucky General Assembly authorized the Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention Loan Forgiveness program to reduce the shortage of minority educators in the Commonwealth. The program consists of a conversion scholarship awarded on a competitive basis to minority students who attend Kentucky's eight public institutions and Community or Technical colleges (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017). Scholarship criteria require recipients to be a minority student, resident of the Commonwealth, maintain 2.75-grade point average, declare education as a major, and be classified as an undergraduate or graduate student completing coursework toward initial certification. Scholarship recipients must obtain certification and agree to teach one semester for each semester that the scholarship is awarded. Failure to fulfill obligations result in the scholarship being transferred into a loan with interest (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017).

Only two of six participants mentioned using services provided by the MERR program coordinator beyond the conversion scholarship. These services included mentoring and traveling. While the program provided a financial means of paying for school two of six participants viewed the program or scholarship in a negative manner. Table 6 provides a visual description of the attitudes held by the participants.

Table 6
Perceptions of Supports Available to Minority Teacher Education Majors

	MERR Participant	MERR Scholarship Recipient	Positive Perception of the MERR program	Negative Perception of the MERR program	Other Resources Mentioned
Peggy		X			X
Ernestine	X	X	X	X	X
Francene	X	X		X	X
Vincent	X	X		X	X
Clarenda Ritta		X			

Francene recalled,

The only thing that I can think of was the Multicultural Student House, Minority Affairs, Black Gospel Ensemble, and Black Greek Organizations. Those were my support system. Ms. Cindy Murray and Ms. Lynne Wright had offices and were available at the Multicultural House. We could go and hang out at the Multicultural House and have meetings. It was a small community within Morehead State University that I could relate to and identify with. It was a home away from home. I would sit down with Ms. Maryanne Hinson and she would review the promissory note for the scholarship with me each semester. My Advisor and Ms. Maryanne Hinson, she was fabulous. She helped and went over the process with me. I felt that she was someone I could ask a question to and I could talk to if I needed anything. (Francene)

Ritta recalled,

Some of the resources I remember came from the Minority Teacher Education Program Coordinator. She offered some supports. I can't remember exactly what they were. I do remember we traveled together. She helped me find other financial support when I entered the teaching field. She was always available when I needed to talk to her. I also utilized the tutoring center.

(Ritta)

Vincent recalled,

The one thing that I know of and it hit me pretty hard was the Minority Education Retention and Recruitment program. It was in the form of a scholarship. The program would give minority students a scholarship of \$2500.00 a year with the stipulation that they would teach in Kentucky after graduation. In the grand scheme of things you earned this scholarship and then the deal was you taught in Kentucky for so many years afterward.

(Vincent)

Clarenda recalled,

As far as tangible resources, I know that there were always tutors. That was a resource that I used. As far as money wise there is a scholarship for minority educators. So that was another good resource because money always seems to be a factor in school and what school you attend. (Clarenda)

Peggy recalled,

And that would be the MERR scholarship. That is all I can think of right off.

Because I really don't think there were any other resources for minorities.

MERR was the only one I used. I used the MERR, which I said I would never want to use that again. (Peggy)

Ernestine indicated that she was not made aware of the MERR program until much later in her college coursework. This fact suggests that more publicity needs to occur so that all eligible minority students can take advantage of the program.

Ernestine recalled,

I believe there was a program for teachers and Black students that wanted to be teachers. I never was invited or heard about it until two peers were going on a trip. I was like, "What program are you all in?" And they were like, "It's a Black teacher program." I was like, "Noone has ever said anything, I mean I'm Black." Did they not see me in the classes? I guess if that program is still going it would be a beneficial program if everyone was included. But, I wasn't involved. (Ernestine)

Peggy mentioned her displeasure with the low criteria expected for MERR scholarship recipients. Peggy described,

It didn't require a high g.p.a. though. Something like a 2.5 or 2.9, something around there. And it helped me while I was going to Morehead State, financially. But, after I graduated these are the stipulations. If one does not get a teaching job 6 months after you graduate, it turns into a loan. That was

the horrible thing for me, trying to find a teaching job in Morehead, Kentucky. That was not good. So being that I did not, I was told by some people at Morehead State University to talk to them. But that didn't help. I was talked down to as if I was beneath them and I found it to be like bitter water in my mouth. I would never do that again. I would never accept a MERR scholarship never again. That was out of desperation. I just wouldn't do it the way it was because the way it set up. Turning into a loan, that really isn't a scholarship. They justified it. You have this period, six months to find a job and then it turns into a loan.

Missing Resources

The participants were asked to describe the resources they felt would have contributed to their success and the resources that should be provided to future teacher education aspirants. Key themes included more diverse settings when completing observation hours and student teaching, the establishment of mentoring programs, and enhanced scholarship programs. Fifty percent of the participants indicated the importance of providing mentoring and one participant mentioned the importance of tutoring.

Clarenda responded, "The main thing that I wish was more visibility to urbanized areas." (Clarenda)

Francene responded,

I guess just the mentorship. Someone to talk to who had been through the program or had similar experiences that I was going through. I think that it

would have helped to ease my questions, fears, and frustrations. Someone that I would have felt comfortable with. (Francene)

Peggy responded,

I feel they could have had more minority scholarships. They put it at a low 2.5 or 2.9 or something. I can't remember, but it probably was like 2.5. I had almost a 4.0. I had a 3.9. So there was nothing beyond that point. That made me think, did they think low of minorities? Let's say someone was struggling, people struggle, so that might be good. But, what about somebody who is doing better? (Peggy)

Ritta responded,

I think having an open tutoring lab for students would be beneficial. The main tutoring center was only for courses that had high failure rates. Some Black students may need help with education courses or business courses. Find what they need specifically and offer support. (Ritta)

Ernestine responded,

I think that students need to have a mentor teacher outside of Morehead. If there was a young student at Morehead now. I feel like someone should connect me with them so that while they are going through the process they can have someone to talk to. (Ernestine)

Vincent responded,

I wished that there would have been some type of mentoring program. Somewhere that there would have been another African American teacher for

me to talk with. Just another person like me that I could relate to in that school system. Just to kind of put it in perspective, I actually ended up not teaching in Kentucky because there just were not any jobs. All of the jobs that I applied for and interviewed for, I was not the person that they were looking for. I don't know what that was. I think I had maybe seven or eight interviews at different Middle and High schools throughout Louisville and Kentucky. I didn't get a position anywhere. I had to go out of state to get a position and even then, I ended up being at a place that wasn't very culturally diverse. In the county that I was in, I was one of four African American teachers in the whole county I didn't know that those teachers existed until some random professional development day. They were in different fields than I was in. We all got together. I had no way of being connected to those other African American teachers. Every now and then it is always good to have someone that you can relate with. Just someone you can sit down and talk to and say these are the issues that I am having. A mentor would have the insight. Without them, you would almost be blindsided if you didn't see it coming. If something crazy happens. I technically had a mentoring teacher. He was not African American. It was the last couple of weeks of school and I got called to the Principal's office. I am thinking it was routine, but it was much more serious. My mentor and I sat down, I said this is the situation and he said, "I don't know what to do." I needed help, I needed guidance. These kids were gunning for me because I was Black and in this school. I was the only

African American teacher and he literally told me “I can’t relate to this because that’s not something that I have had to deal with.” If I would have had an African American mentor I would have at least been able to say, “Do you have any thoughts, what do I do?” And I feel like an African American mentor would have been able to say, “People are going to gun for you because you are that one. You are isolated because you are alone. Here are some things that you can do to prevent that from happening again.” “These are the steps that you take to make sure that everyone is on the same page as you. This is what you can do to relate to the kids.” More than just, “I don’t know what to do because I can’t relate.” (Vincent)

Even though the participants indicated that they were called or lead to teaching there were several moments when they questioned their decision. To examine instances of indecision the participants were asked to provide an example of a time when they considered changing their major. The participants were asked to describe the factors that promoted them to continue as teacher education majors? One participant, Ernestine, actually changed her major from teaching to another major. Francene mentioned that she considered changing her major from teacher education to another area due to certification test requirements.

Ritta recollected,

I changed my major from Elementary Education to Business. After doing my practicum hours in an Elementary School. I knew it wasn't for me. I loved

Business. I loved education, I decided to merge the two together and became a Business/Technology teacher. (Ritta)

Peggy recollected,

No. I never considered changing my major because I had prayed about it. I could not get away from education. I could not get away from education. I woke up, I breathed it. I went to bed thinking about it. I didn't want children to feel the way I had felt. So, if they did I wanted to pull them out of that because it was an ugly place. A negative place. For a lot of children, it's hard to get out of. A lot of children never get out of it. I realized that. I was blessed to get out. I wanted to give back and that's something I loved. I never thought of getting out of education. However, I thought of leaving Morehead State University because of what I went through. (Peggy)

Vincent recollected,

There wasn't a moment when I wanted to change my major. There were moments when I questioned am I doing what I need? Am I getting what I need to be successful? I never thought that education was not for me. It depended on the situation. Sometimes, I would sit back and reevaluate the situation and then go to my support. Go to the professors that I trusted and would sit down and talk to them about what's going through my head. And just come up with a different solution to those situations. I use the phrase back up and punt. Sometimes that's what I would have to do, back up and punt. Try again. Even when you have to try again, you can't give up. That's where some issues lie

with people. They give up, they give up too soon. They give up too early, they don't fight for it. They just kind of say, "It's not going to work, so I'm done." (Vincent)

Peggy was the only participant who considered transferring due to her experiences as a Black teacher education major at Morehead State University. Peggy recollected,

I was on the verge of leaving Morehead State and going to another college. I had actually talked to a person who worked at another College. He was encouraging me to pursue that. Of course, that college didn't have as high of standards as Morehead did. That was the problem. I almost left Morehead State University because of the way that I was treated. A lot of times I had to fight for myself. If you don't have that fight for yourself, I don't know. I see why they drop out and leave because you have to have that fight in you.

(Peggy)

Clarenda was the only participant who was initially in another major and changed to teacher education. Clarenda recollected,

Originally, I went in as a Social Work major and then after taking a few of those classes I just realized that wasn't for me. So, I went into education. Initially, I went in as a Middle School major. I felt like middle school-age children were the ones that I could connect with. I wasn't into the little kids. I wasn't into the older kids. The older kids were too close to my age and the little kids were just too needy. So, that's why I chose middle school. At one

point I was like maybe I should try Elementary School. I don't know what lead up to that point. I probably was struggling in some of the courses for Middle School, they are a little more complex. I didn't like it at all, I went back to middle school.

Francene was the only participant who mentioned changing her major due to certification tests. Francene recollected, "Yes, when it came to the Praxis. Especially, when it got hard with the Praxis."

Ernestine recollected,

I did change my major at the beginning of my sophomore year. I just felt a real disconnect with the teacher program. I didn't really feel included in anything. But, I switched back to education because I knew that was my calling and that's what I would be most beneficial in the world doing. I had an Advisor through Student Support Services. I would talk to him and he was just like, "This is for you, just go ahead and go back." (Ernestine)

Table 7 provides a visual representation of the responses obtained during the interviews about the participants' consideration of changing their major or transferring.

Table 7
Consideration of Changing Major or Leaving the Institution

	Participant Changed Major	Participant Considered Changing Major	Participant Considered Transferring
Peggy			X
Ernestine	X		
Francene		X	
Vincent			
Clarenda			
Ritta			

Sources of Empowerment

In addition to describing instances when the participants considered changing their program, the participants were asked to discuss the factors that kept them empowered during obstacles and times of indecision. Commonalities included family (33%), spirituality (50 %), faculty and staff (50%) the desire to succeed to dispel the expectations of others, and the opportunity to give back (67%).

The participants mentioned institutional resources such participation in student clubs and organizations, the Minority Education Recruitment and Retention program, support from Advisors and other institutional staff, the Multicultural House, tutoring, mentorship from Black faculty and staff, and fellowship with Black faculty and staff as contributors of their empowerment.

Clarenda

“I knew I would be a teacher. I never had anyone who looked like me. That is one of the things that empowered me to be a teacher” (Clarenda).

Peggy

I feel like my upbringing, I had very strong parents. They were very strong-willed and they gave me tough love and my dad always talked about surmountable courage. The will to overcome and he talked about it continuously and he wrote poems. His poems encouraged me to get an education. To finish my education, because he did not get to do it. He just got to graduate high school. His mother died and his daddy was already dead. He could not go, he had to help his other brothers and sisters. I felt like I was not only going for myself, I was going for him and my mother. The same type of environment with her pushing us to go on. Pushing us to be strong. So to be honest with you, I feel like I had the backbone from my parents and then anything that any teacher talked to me about. I used that. Now there was one but she was an elementary teacher of mine. She was a woman of color. I thought she was very hard, too tough. She was trying so hard to let the Caucasian students understand that she was not being partial. She unintentionally mistreated some of the ones of color. And that came to me, why she did that. So, when I grew up and she found out that I was actually doing substitute teaching she encouraged me. She said, “You get your degree.” That is one woman of color from my background. She actually

encouraged me to get my degree. Just praying and my family. When I say my family, my brothers and sisters. You can say they were my cheerleaders. And my husband, rooting me on. So, that encouraged me. As far as people at Morehead State University, the one professor who pulled me aside and really wanted me to talk to her. She was a positive. There was a classroom management teacher, she was very positive. So there were a few people like that who were very good people and they were encouraging. So, I had to say I had some and there was definitely a few at Morehead State University. I will reiterate that. I had a two-dimensional teacher, I didn't care for the two-dimensional class. But, she was sick herself and one day she realized I was troubled and she begged me to stay in her room to talk to her. I wouldn't do it, I just couldn't. I said I would be ok. I couldn't do it, but the fact that she literally stayed late and begged me to talk to her made me realize how much she cared. She was a Caucasian teacher, and she cared a lot. So there are some there. There's the good, the bad, and the ugly at all universities and she was definitely a plus. (Peggy)

Ritta

The factors that I feel contributed to my empowerment as a teacher major was my determination and focus. Others who may be interested in pursuing education need to just stay focused and don't give up. If they fail a test, don't give up study. Find resources and practice. But, don't quit! (Ritta)

Vincent

What really kept me going was the end thing. What I wanted to do while I was at Morehead. I wanted to be a High School Band Director. That was my goal and I was going to do anything and everything I could to learn anything and everything so that goal would be attained. I wasn't going to let anything get in my way. It was that drive, that grit that kept me going. There were a lot of late nights. There were a lot of early mornings. I would get up and go to class and be in class from nine to ten in the morning until six or seven o'clock at night. I would go back to the dorm and work on something or study from seven until midnight. There were a lot of days like that because I wanted to accomplish and achieve that goal of being a High School Band Director. I just wasn't going to let anything get in the way of that, because I knew that's where my destiny was going. I knew that was where I was headed and that's all I could do was to work towards that. (Vincent)

Francene

I don't think that it was a coincidence that the MERR scholarship fell in my lap. I have always wanted to be a teacher. The cards fell into place. I knew that I wanted to make a difference for many, many students in general. Especially those who look like me. I wanted them to know that you can be whatever you want to be. I wanted to be proof of that and Morehead allowed me to be that through the education program. I felt like it was a calling. It's something that you can't shake. It was something I was destined for. I knew

within my heart that I was destined to work with children, to teach them, to educate them, and to shape their futures. It was bigger than me! I just knew that I had to fight tooth and nail to get to where I needed to be. (Francene)

Ernestine

My willpower to be better than my counterparts. I feel like I have always had that instilled in me, that you are always going to be looked down upon. So you always have to rise above and be double than their best person. So if their person is an Einstein you need to be two. So, I personally wanted to be successful just to show that I can do it. I am an A/B student. I have always been on the Dean's list. You are not going to write me off as just another Black face. (Ernestine)

Table 8 identifies the sources of empowerment for the participants.

Table 8

Sources of Empowerment

Participant	Family	Spirituality	Faculty/ Staff	Self-Will	Dispel Myths of others/Provide exposure for future K- 12 Students
Peggy	X	X	X		
Ernestine			X		X
Francene	X	X	X	X	X
Vincent					X
Clarenda					X
Ritta		X		X	

After reflecting upon their experiences at Morehead State University, points of frustration and perseverance, and the resources that were used the participants were asked to suggest strategies that future Black teacher education majors can use to achieve initial certification. Fifty percent of the participants mentioned tutoring. Similarly, fifty percent of the participants identified peer support or mentoring. An additional strategy involved getting involved on-campus.

Ritta suggested,

I think having an open tutoring lab for students would be beneficial. The main tutoring center was only for courses that had high failure rates. Some Black students may need help with education courses or business courses.

Find what they need specifically and offer support. (Ritta)

Ernestine suggested,

I think they need to start study groups together and form bonds and find other education majors that look like them and are on the same track. So they can at least have someone to talk to about it. Luckily, I had a sorority sister who was in the education program. If I was doing something that I needed help with, she could help me with education. I had another sorority sister that if I was struggling in math, she would help me with math. If it wasn't for my sorority sisters, I would probably be like ugh.... My advice is to find someone that can help you and stick with that study group. (Ernestine)

Clarenda suggested,

I would say be involved as much as possible in the program and in general. It just helps your experience in college. I was a member of a sorority and I was also a member of the Black Gospel Ensemble. I was a member of Impact where we did Christian outreach. Actually, I was involved in a lot. I was a member of the Minority Leadership Caucus and then the Teacher Recruitment Program. One of the main purposes of the minority Leadership Caucus was to recruit minorities to come to Morehead and keep minorities at Morehead. The Black Gospel Ensemble, we were a singing group. We sang gospel of course. We would go to different schools and churches to perform. The Black Gospel Ensemble was something that I really enjoyed. We got to travel and people got to see that there were actually minorities in Morehead. People seem to think that no minorities go to Morehead. That was another recruitment tool. In my sorority, we did different community service activities and we would have

different programs on campus. Our programs were just to get everyone involved. We tried to have informational things like study tables to help if they wanted to work on their studies. We would have different programs on campus just to give the minority students something to do. We would do our community service activities out in the community. We adopted a highway. We would go and clean up the trash on the highway. We would just try to do things in the community to be seen and on campus to be seen so that minority students know that there are things and ways to be involved on campus and in the community. (Clarenda)

Vincent suggested,

They have to have a dream. They have to be willing to go towards it. They have to find likeminded people. When I was at Morehead, and this is not in any way derogatory in any way, there were some African Americans that I did not associate with. And a lot of it was just because they did not have the same goals that I had. They did not have the same kind of grit that I had. I knew that if I spent time with them, I would have been compromised and I couldn't do that. So for students nowadays, they have to realize that sometimes you have to step away from the things that are going to compromise what you want to achieve. Not to say that occasionally I would go out to that party. But at the same time, I didn't let that one-moment compromise what my goal was. You have to have that dream. You have to work towards that dream. You have to surround yourself with people who are going to support that

dream. For students now and this is for any student not just students of color, they have to have a support system. They have to have people around them that they connect with. They have to have that grit to work toward the goal and not let anything get in their way. They can't be compromised by other people. They just have to go. (Vincent)

Peggy suggested,

I do feel that they need to strive. Strive to keep the grades up, even if you have to go to a tutor. Search and find different tutors, strive for that. Do not procrastinate. Get your work done. I know when most people go to college they like to play ball and this and that. Some of the activity is fine, but I think you need to limit it. All that stuff can contribute to failure, that's possible. And managing their time, time management is something they can work on. If they don't know how to do it, try to find someone who can help them manage their time and give them suggestions. Focus on involvement within the community. You know stuff they can volunteer with. Go with more positive things that can build them up instead of tearing them down. Because sometimes students tend to maybe go to a lot of partying, get drunk, things that will keep them from being successful. Stay with positive people as much as possible. (Peggy)

Francene suggested,

Maybe in the future, they could do some type of mentor programs (if they have not initiated one). Possibly, mentor programs might help the Black

teacher majors to stay connected. I think that helping them study more for the Praxis will prepare them. I had to fight to pass the Praxis. So, I think that could be something that sharpens them. Test-taking strategies and preparing them more for tests could be another thing. I also think having more opportunities to observe in different settings, more diverse settings. Morehead is great. But, if you expect to go outside of Morehead you will be confronted with diverse issues. Our world is not just one color or one gender or one ethnic group. So, I think exposing them to a little bit more diversity would be good. (Francene)

Table 9 provides a synopsis of suggested strategies mentioned by the study participants.

Table 9

Suggestions for Future Black Teacher Education Majors

Participant	Tutoring	Involvement in Student Organizations	Mentoring/peer support
Peggy		X	X
Ernestine	X		
Francene			X
Vincent			X
Clarenda	X	X	
Ritta	X		

When asked to describe the strategies that were used to overcome an issue specifically related to being a Black teacher education major Clarenda and Peggy offered several accounts. Clarenda described an experience related to being a Black

education major connected to her efforts as a student recruiter in the Future Teacher recruitment program. Francene mentioned her experiences during observation and student teaching experiences.

Clarenda's Experience

The only time that I can remember any controversy, I was working with the teacher recruitment program, and I would go out with the lady who was over it. I would go out to different high schools, and I would try to recruit students to come to Morehead and to also be in the teacher education program. So, it was specifically for the teacher education program. We took a trip, and we went to Pikeville. We always would go over the different scholarships. There is the minority education scholarship for teaching as well. So, she would always mention that at any other school that we went to. When we went to Pikeville, she didn't mention it. That was the only time I felt there was any controversy in reference to race. I felt offended by that and I addressed it. Then we moved on. It was a big deal. I had a meeting with her and her supervisor. It was a big issue. I sent an email to her and her boss. I made sure that we all sat down and had a meeting. She understood that we were in a certain area but the students might know someone who would benefit from that scholarship. So, we should not skip over it. (Clarenda)

Francene's Experience

I do remember going into some of the classrooms in Rowan County and everyone was nice. I remember getting certain looks. It could have been my

imagination but in some cases it made me feel uncomfortable. It was the adults in the building, not the students. It was not all adults, just some of them. It was at the elementary level. To overcome the issue, that goes back to what I was taught at home. To rise above, kill them with kindness, and show them that Jesus is Love. It goes back to my foundation, how I was raised.

(Francene)

Each of the participants mentioned their involvement in student clubs, organizations, and outside spaces to counter the negative experiences that they encountered as students at Morehead State University. Four participants mentioned their participation in the Morehead State University Black Gospel Ensemble. Three participants, Clarendia, Ritta, and Francene mentioned their participation in a historically Black sorority. Two participants recalled their experiences in honor's societies. When asked about the Black Gospel Ensemble, Vincent stated,

The Black Gospel ensemble is a Christian group. They have been around for quite some time. It was a choir that got together and their mantra was Christian worship... from a.... I don't want to say a Black gospel perspective but from that style of music. That ensemble would go and perform and worship not only in the Morehead community, but they were going out and traveling around to different churches and communities. I know that when I was a member we went to Tennessee on tour. We went to a couple of other places. Every year I was a member of the ensemble we toured. The members within the choir would go to their home church. The whole idea was

worshiping God and Jesus. That was the whole thing behind that choir, that kind of energy. Yes, it was a different outlet of music. It allowed me to stay connected to Christianity and keep my relationship with Jesus Christ in check. There really wasn't a church that I called home in Morehead. So, I needed to have that kind of outlet to keep my connection strong with God. (Vincent)

Although four participants were required to complete certification tests in their respective content areas multiple times, Francene was the only participant who explicitly described her struggle with testing and its impact on her life. Francene offered,

My struggle with the Praxis is a part of my testimony and where I have come from. I had taken the Praxis and failed it several times. I think I ended up taking it maybe five or more times. I started off struggling with the ACT, so testing, in general, was hard. I graduated in 2004. I was hired by my current district in 2005 on a one-year provisional certificate because I had not passed the Praxis. I had one year to pass the test or I was going to lose my certification. Within the year, I took the test several times and I passed it on one attempt. But, a new version was implemented. I took the new version and I failed it because it was new to me. Each time, I got closer and closer to passing it before the test was changed. The scores that I earned on the old version ended up counting because of my history in taking the old version of the test. I wonder what stories other minorities have with struggling with hard tests. I tried to study and to remember topics that were on the test to

review. As far as content, I tried to review information that was covered in courses. I had a book. My mother moved heaven and earth trying to help me pass. A lot of prayer helped me through it. I am curious if study sessions are available now. I feel that we are losing a lot of people in the education field because of one test. I do not think that one test should be the determining factor if someone can be a good teacher. What I can do in the classroom far outweighs what I can do on the test. We later learned during my junior year that I had a reading disability. I did not know until my junior year in college. If I had known earlier, I would have dealt with that. Going to a Psychologist helped to diagnosis my disability. That was a part of my problem as well.

(Francene)

The participants described their feelings about whether the Morehead State University teacher preparation program prepared them with the necessary skills to enter the field of teaching. One participant mentioned that she received insight into her own learning as a participant in the program. This knowledge has benefited her throughout her career as a Community College instructor. Another participant mentioned the impact that her minority status has had on her success due to limited exposure to diverse experiences during her participation in the program. Vincent reflected that the program prepared him with the skills to teach. However, it failed to address other aspects such as the “extra” or the additional responsibilities associated with teaching. Vincent offered,

Yes and No. In terms of how to teach, yes. In terms of how to deal with students, yes. What I wish there had been more of across the board, what I wasn't prepared for was all of the extra. The extra paperwork, the understanding of when I was in the classroom I am not only responsible for the student's learning, but I also am responsible for the students themselves. Nothing could have prepared me for the different kinds of students that I could've walked into. You know it's like the school shooting that happened....and the students walked out of school yesterday or the day before. As a teacher how do I handle those situations? Those are the things that I wish people would have prepared me for. The extra things. They did a really good job on teaching me educational philosophies and how to sit down and talk to students and how to defend myself in different situations. They did an excellent job with those things. This is completely hypothetical, but what to do when my administrator is a racist? What do I do in that kind of situation? What do I do when I have a kid in my class whose home life is terrible and the reason that they are acting out is because they don't get the attention that they need at home? What do I do in that situation without crossing boundaries? They don't prepare us for the extra. For the things teachers have to do to maintain the health of their students. We are not prepared for that. What do I do for a kid whose dad just died? Those kinds of things? That there is more to teaching than just the principles, learning concepts, and learning styles. There is more to it than just that. You don't

teach just to say that you are a teacher. There is a different level of responsibility that you don't have at any other job. Teaching requires more than just the nine to five. You have to know when to fight and when to back off.

Peggy offered,

Only partially, for those positive people who rooted for me. I had an art teacher who also rooted me on. I had a three-dimension art teacher. She helped me to understand about myself. That concept is where I am so visual. I am a very visual person. I thought something was wrong with me because I was so visual. I had to see it in my mind. If I couldn't see it in my mind, I couldn't do it. I thought that it was something lacking on my part. When I got ready to do this three-dimensional piece and I explained it to her she said, "That is wonderful." I thought...nope... that's wonderful that I'm visual? But, see I draw and if I can see it in my mind, I can do it. If I can't. I can't do it. I have to look at something, I have to look at an example. But, she thought that was wonderful. If I saw it in my mind, I could draw it. With her encouragement, I was able to do large, very large three-dimensional pieces out of cardboard boxes. So, I really had some teachers at Morehead State University who inspired me. Some went far and beyond.

Ritta offered,

I do feel that I was prepared with the necessary skills to enter the teaching field. I felt like the observation experiences were essential. It helped me get an

idea of what my career would be about. I got to observe elementary, middle and high schools. Being able to student teach in Louisville was also important since I planned on teaching in Louisville. It was beneficial for me to observe and serve the area I planned to work in.

Clarenda offered, “Yes.”

While five participants reflected that they felt prepared to enter the teaching field, Francene mentioned the impact that lack of diversity coursework and related experiences had on her personal experience. Ernestine also expressed that she was not prepared to teach in a diverse setting. Francene offered,

Yes, for the most part. I think that me being a minority helped with the diversity aspect. I would fear for some of my peers who have not had the same experiences with diversity as I because I did not see a lot of diversity when I was there.

Ernestine offered,

No, I was not prepared at all, whatsoever. I was just fortunate enough that when I did my student teaching, which happened to be in a rural setting, that I was with a very strong veteran teacher. I just so happened to be in the same building as the woman that I idolized. She took me under her wings right along with my teacher here. They prepared me for becoming a teacher. But, it was still a major culture shock going from the rural setting to the urban setting. Even as a Black teacher it was a major culture shock to have classes

that were predominantly Black kids. I wasn't ready for that because I never experienced that as a student myself.

When asked to provide additional feedback several participants offered to serve as mentors, mentioned the need for additional efforts in recruiting minority teachers and addressed the need to vet observation and student teaching sites.

Francene offered,

"I would be willing to help in any way that I can to mentor or share my experiences. I do feel that we need more minority educators. I just want to help someone else along the way" (Francene).

Ernestine offered,

I feel like in order for public education to be successful there has to be more minority teachers. Especially more minority male teachers. But, I don't see Morehead wanting that or going out of their way to recruit for that. I think there needs to be recruitment to encourage the Black youth to go into education. (Ernestine)

Peggy offered,

I believe that Morehead State University (if they have not done so by this point) should research how minorities are treated at these schools in the little city of Morehead, KY before they send minorities out there. It is almost like setting them up to fail. Sending them out there and the Caucasian students are treated one way and they are treated another. That's horrible. I think that they should do research before they send minorities out to fail. If it had not

been for my determination, my surmountable courage that my daddy talked about, for me begging God for strength and to look over other people's ignorance, I wouldn't have made it. (Peggy)

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted qualitative data collected from individual interviews conducted with six Black certified teachers regarding their lived experiences as undergraduate students at Morehead State University. The experiences shared by the participants paralleled prior studies.

Several themes emerged from the interviews, these themes include:

- a) lack of diversity in content and pre-teaching experiences,
- b) the influence of Black faculty and staff on the retention of Black students,
- c) the need for more intentional supports to fulfill certification requirements such as standardized tests, and
- e) the lack of diverse faculty in teacher education and general education courses.

Data retrieved from individual interviews and the demographic survey revealed several mutual themes among the study participants about the factors that contributed to their empowerment as Black students. The factors that empowered the participants included

- a) spirituality,
- b) family support,
- c) membership in student clubs and organizations,

- d) self-empowerment and motivation,
- e) the desire to create a pathway for future generations,
- f) Support from minority and non-minority faculty/staff, and
- g) the desire to provide Black students across the Commonwealth with access to more Black teachers as factors.

Some of the challenges faced by the participants included adverse treatment during observation and student teaching experiences, lack of access to diverse settings during pre-service teaching experiences, and microaggressions by faculty. The participants possessed an immense calling to the field of education, which sustained them during trials and tribulations. In addition to being called, the participants possessed an immense desire to expose future generations of students to Black and minority educators and to make a difference. Although the participants reflected positive memories of their general education coursework, microaggressions were identified by fifty percent of the participants. The participants addressed the microaggressions by directly confronting the issue and the aggressor. In total, sixty-seven percent of the participants described an experience with microaggressions.

At some point during the discussion, 83 percent of the participants indicated a lack of diversity in either coursework or related experiences such as observation hours. Although the presence of Black and minority faculty and staff provided an additional layer of support for the participants, only fifty percent received instruction from a minority faculty. Eighty-three percent of the participants mentioned support provided by minority staff, while sixty-seven percent of the participants highlighted

the support provided by non-minority faculty/staff. Eighty-three percent of the participants received the Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention Scholarship and fifty percent of the participants participated in activities sponsored by the program. Fifty percent of the participants credited their empowerment to their spirituality, the support provided by faculty/staff, and their will to persevere to either dispel societal myths or to increase the presence of Black teachers in the K-12 education setting. When discussing future supports for Black and minority teacher education majors, fifty percent of the participants mentioned tutoring and mentoring.

Eighty-three percent of the participants felt that they were prepared to enter the field of teaching. However, lack of diversity in content and student teaching/observation experiences was unanimous. While the institution hosts Diversity Days and has an active Black Gospel Ensemble to promote the institution's commitment to diversity, there is an immense amount of work to be done. There is a need to continue to promote the institution and recruit Black teacher education majors. It is essential that more minority faculty need to be hired to provide students with diverse classroom experiences that are desired by pre-service teachers and needed to address the changing demographics of students across the United States. Therefore, it is important institutional, state, and federal budgets reflect the immediate importance of increasing minority staff. The interviews revealed that it is not enough to be grounded in theory or content knowledge, the needs of today's students require a profound depth of knowledge to connect with and teach them.

In the face of successfully becoming certified teachers, the study participants faced challenges and obstacles in their pursuit. However, they did not allow these obstacles to deter them and their aspirations. To assist future pre-service teachers, the participants suggested the forming a mentorship program, more exposure to diverse settings during student teaching and observation hours, vetting observation and student-teaching sites and increasing initiatives to recruit more minorities as areas of improvement for the institution.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

This study used semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of six Black alumni of Morehead State University to determine which aspects of their attendance were effective in promoting their success as teacher education majors. Feedback provided by the participants is beneficial to faculty and staff, students, administrators, and lawmakers. Understanding the experiences of Black teacher education majors has the potential to increase and improve upon campus-wide initiatives, institutional policies, resources, and services for all students. Although the research study included participants who graduated from Morehead State University, the findings have the potential to assist institutions of all sizes and types.

Counter storytelling as described by Ladson-Billings (2004) provides an opportunity to describe and place emphasis on the lived experiences and experiential knowledge of marginalized populations and to contradict stories told by dominant society. Conducting a qualitative phenomenological study allowed the participants to share their success stories and counter existing literature about the experiences of Black teacher education majors. The previous chapter introduced the participants, recounted their experiences, and provided an analysis of the findings. This chapter presents conclusions and future recommendations.

The study participants offered important feedback about their decision to attend Morehead State University, their decision to enter the teaching profession, the factors that helped them to persist, and the impact of their preparation on their actual

experiences as teachers. Several consistent and recurring themes emerged from the interviews and demographic survey data. These themes included lack of student diversity in general and teacher education courses, limited exposure to diversity during observation and student teaching experiences, lack of diversity in curriculum, limited access to diverse faculty, and limited opportunities for mentoring by peers and professionals in the field. Findings in the present study mirrored prior studies. However, this study offers some different feedback directly related to the research site.

This study used two research questions to explore the experiences of the participants and the factors that they felt led to their success and certification. The first question asked the participants to describe their experiences. While most of the participants initially described their experience as positive, several participants shared instances of hardship. These difficulties occurred during their general education classes, observation experiences, and during student teaching experiences. Several participants expressed difficulty in passing standardized certification tests and difficulty adjusting to the teaching profession because of inadequate exposure to diverse experiences during their preparation. The second question asked the participants to describe the factors that sustained and empowered them. The participants described social and academic supports and interactions with faculty and staff.

Recruitment to the Institution

Only one participant mentioned that Morehead State University was their first choice. Three participants mentioned their participation in programs and activities designed to introduce minority students and future minority teachers to the college. The remaining participants based their decision to attend the institution on scholarship opportunities. Morehead State University might find it beneficial to collaborate with alumni to promote the institution and share their positive experiences to generate interest. Additional scholarship opportunities that extend beyond the Minority Educator Recruitment and Retention scholarship may also attract minority students. Strategic activities implemented by alumni such as wearing college paraphernalia in their place of employment, displaying pennants in classrooms or office spaces, and conducting specialized college tours and campus visits to the College of Education also have the potential to increase and generate the interest of future students. Feedback from the study suggests the need for more recruitment at schools that have high minority enrollment and recruitment at non-traditional venues. Examples include churches, activities sponsored by Greek-affiliated organizations, and organizations that serve youth.

The MERR Program

Five participants mentioned that they were recipients of the Minority Education Recruitment and Retention scholarship. When discussing the scholarship, many of the responses solely identified the financial benefits associated with receiving the scholarship. There were limited responses regarding additional supports

offered by the MERR program. Two participants reflected that the Coordinator of the MERR program served as a source of support and one participant mentioned engaging in travel as a scholarship recipient. However, none of the participants mentioned intentional programming that addressed common hindrances experienced by minority teacher education majors such as specialized observation experiences in urban and suburban settings, alliances with public institutions to assist with job placement after graduation, certification examination resources, or testing vouchers. Participant feedback suggests that the MERR program needs to have more visibility on campus and should make specific efforts to contact minority teacher education majors to identify their needs. In addition, the program should include specialized services for scholarship recipients that prepare them to enter into the teaching profession.

Experiences in General Education Coursework

Although the participants completed their general education coursework and persisted to graduation, the participants were impacted by negative interactions with faculty and curriculum. Two participants were offended by culturally insensitive representations of Blacks and other minorities in their coursework. The participants directly addressed the concern with the faculty member, an approach identified in prior studies as a coping mechanism for microaggressions (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Though neither participant experienced retaliation, one participant mentioned that she distrusted the faculty member because of her experience. The experiences demonstrate the significance of on-going and regular

diversity training, cultural competency training, and the importance of hiring more faculty who represent all underrepresented populations. Although institutions are becoming more diverse, the experiences of the participants in their general education experiences reflect the power that majority members of society still hold with curriculum design and the transfer of information.

Experiences in Teacher Preparation Coursework

Each participant mentioned diversity as a missing aspect of their experience. While exploring the experiences of the participants during their teacher preparation courses two recurring themes were mentioned, lack of diversity in curriculum and lack of access to diverse experiences. Two participants described negative accounts during their observation and student teaching experiences. The extreme negative personal experiences caused one participant to consider transferring from Morehead State University. This data attests to the need for diversity training within Rowan County and surrounding school districts. Though the participants were minorities, several mentioned their under-preparedness in working with diverse student populations and in urban settings since their experiences were overwhelmingly in rural settings. Therefore, it is essential that Morehead State University expose all students to student teaching and observation experiences in urban and rural settings.

Access to Diverse Faculty and Staff

Only three participants were taught by a minority faculty member during their general education coursework. Similarly, only two participants were taught by a minority faculty member during their teacher preparation courses. During the

interviews, the participants mentioned their immense desire to have someone who reflected them as an instructor. For several participants, their primary reason for entering the teaching profession was to provide this opportunity to K-12 students. One participant recalled the manner that they were impacted by having someone who they could relate to. The experiences of the participants were enhanced by having a faculty member with whom they shared a similar background and culture. The sense of family and camaraderie that was created through interactions with minority faculty was a source of encouragement and promise for the participants. One participant mentioned the sense of pride that she felt in having a minority faculty member recognize her potential as a future teacher, this was something that she felt other faculty did not recognize in her. It is recommended that the research site continue to recruit minority faculty who represent all areas of academia.

Sources of Empowerment

The second research question delved into the factors that sustained Black alumni during their pre-service teaching experience at Morehead State University. Several participants wanted to counter existing stories about the number of Blacks and minorities who enter teaching, this sustained them and provided them with the willpower to persevere. Other participants were sustained through strong family ties and connections, a strong desire to increase the number of Black teachers in public schools, the aspiration of making a difference for others, and an opportunity to pay tribute to past generations of Black teachers. Self-determination, immense focus, and wanting to reach a goal also served as sources of empowerment. The participants

also mentioned the support of staff in the offices such as Financial Aid and Multicultural Student Services.

Grier-Reed (2010) discussed counter spaces as a means of coping with microaggressions and retreating from the exhaustion caused by discrimination. Counter-spaces provide a space where students, faculty, and staff can interact with peers from a variety of cultures to collectively learn about and embrace diversity. An additional recommendation for the research site involves setting the expectation that institutional departments collaborate on events that allow non-minority and minority groups to come together outside of traditional cultural history months and outside of the traditional academic setting. One participant mentioned the feeling of home that the Multicultural House gave her.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) confirmed the importance of involvement among college students. Each of the participants mentioned their involvement in campus-based student clubs and organizations. The majority of the clubs and organizations were predominantly Black organizations. These organizations included historically Black sororities, the Black Gospel Ensemble, the Minority Leadership Caucus, intramurals, honor's societies, and a Christian outreach organization. The activities included on and off campus community service, worship and spiritually based experiences, recruitment and retention activities and the promotion of academic achievement using collective action. A recommendation for the research site is to create more inclusive environments where student clubs and organizations collaborate across multiple settings so that students who represent underrepresented segments and

majority students can become actively involved and exposed to new experiences, new ideas, and become allies.

Promoting collaboration among student groups begins with collaborative relationships across departments and offices that would not generally work together. Because each participant was involved in extracurricular activities and mentioned that their involvement helped their retention, it can be assumed that the participants were seeking somewhere to belong in times of isolation. Membership in student clubs and organizations also addressed the aspect of familiar opportunities to engage in spiritual experiences that were missing at the institution. None of the participants mentioned their involvement in off-campus activities within the community. Introducing students to off-campus activities such as cooperative extension and other civic organizations may assist them in connecting with the greater community.

Recommendations for Future Students

The establishment of study groups and peer mentoring are two recommendations mentioned as success strategies for future students. An additional recommendation is to pair Black teacher education majors with a peer mentor, faculty mentor, and external mentor as a three-tier support system and wrap around approach. By providing this approach Black teacher education majors are reinforced at multiple levels from a variety of different perspectives.

The climate and diversity of campus can affect student retention and how connected a student feels to the campus (Allen, 1992). Just as feeling connected to an institution is vital in student persistence, so is feeling connected to a program as

evidenced by feedback from the participants. One participant mentioned that she changed her major. However, she was influenced by a staff member to pursue her passion for teaching and returned to pursuing teacher education. The participant mentioned that she did not feel connected to the teacher education program. After analyzing study data it is important to create programs and activities to create feelings of connectedness. Further, the needs of students that arise based on student classification while participating in competitive programs is another area of consideration. Feedback from the participants revealed that students have additional expectations after they are admitted into programs. The needs of a first-year teacher education major will significantly differ from the needs of a third-year teacher education major. Therefore, specific programs and activities that address issues based on the classification of a student are important in addressing student needs as they occur during key milestones.

Entering the Profession

It is important that Morehead State University develop a mentoring program that pairs new and pre-service teachers with current alum in the field. The majority of the participants mentioned that the program prepared them to enter into the field of teaching. However, they also mentioned the need for mentoring opportunities and access to more experiences in urban settings. Through formalized mentoring opportunities, undergraduate students will receive an additional layer of support that complements efforts made through academic advising and career services. This additional support will assist teacher education majors in learning about the

expectations and possible experiences that they will encounter, even if not provided by the institution.

Future Recommendations

This study offered an initial examination into the experiences of Black teacher education majors at Morehead State University. The goal was to share success stories to counter and invert mainstream assertions that Blacks do not want to enter the teaching profession. This study only touched the surface in learning about the lived experiences of Black and minority students at Morehead State University, as it only included teacher education majors who were successful in their endeavor to achieve certification. A recommendation for future research includes conducting a qualitative study with teacher education majors who did not successfully achieve certification to identify their perceived barriers. Additional recommendations include actively recruiting minority faculty to teach in the College of Education, vetting observation and student teaching sites for their commitment to diversity and acceptance of minority pre-service teachers, providing diversity and cultural sensitivity training to observation and student teaching sites, increasing the depth of services provided to recipients of the Minority Education Recruitment and Retention scholarship, and providing specific test preparation and remediation opportunities for Black and minority teacher education majors for certification tests.

The negative student teaching and observation experiences expressed by several participants occurred at several different locations, within a 30-mile radius of Morehead, Kentucky. The repetitiveness of adverse treatment suggests the need for

immediate validation and reassignment when a student shares experiences or showing signs of mistreatment. Once known these occurrences should be addressed with district leadership. These interactions, as evidenced by participant feedback, create stress and pressure to perform in unwelcoming circumstances that could result in physical, mental, or emotional unrest. Another recommendation is to partner pre-service and new minority teachers with a mentor in an urban area to complement the predominantly rural exposure that teacher education majors will routinely be exposed to as undergraduate teacher education majors at Morehead State University.

This study sought feedback from Black teachers. However, receiving feedback from other segments of the minority population will provide a different and much-needed perspective. Contacting minority students who transferred may be another way of identifying additional areas of growth for the University. Additional recommendations include continuing to survey minority students and implementing immediate changes when issues occur. Polling students who reside in residence halls about their experiences is also essential as research identifies that microaggressions occur outside of academic settings on college campuses. After analyzing data collected from the participants a final recommendation is to hire specific counseling and support services for students based on specific programs of study. Lastly, the creation of a social justice center would benefit all students so that diversity can consistently be on the minds of the institution, the policies that are created and implemented, and the services offered.

Chapter Summary

This chapter identified several areas of consideration for the research site and institutions of higher education across the nation. These suggestions included increasing diversity training across faculty, staff, the community, and students. Also, diversity and cultural competency training should be required for districts that accept student teachers and pre-service teachers from Morehead State University. Several of the participants mentioned their desire to serve as mentors to future educators and lack of mentorship as a missing element during their attendance at Morehead State University. The institution should implement a formal mentor/mentee program, specifically for teacher education majors. This program should include off-site alumni who are active teachers familiar with best practices and pitfalls experienced by new teachers. Although most of the participants received the MERR scholarship feedback from the interviews revealed the need for additional services offered by the program beyond the financial aspect. Enhancing the recruitment and retention services provided by the office that administers the MERR program might potentially help to attract more minority students, assist with job placement, and also benefit future students in test preparation, an area that several study participants struggled in.

There are numerous benefits associated with increasing student diversity. Individually, diversity increases racial and cultural awareness, improves future opportunities for occupational and residential desegregation after graduation, enriches critical thinking skills, and contributes to satisfaction. Moreover, diversity increases creativity, innovation, and improves problem-solving (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2009;

Milem, 2003). Our greater society benefits from diverse college campuses through the services provided to the greater community and underserved groups, the promotion of equity, and an educated citizenry (Milem, 2003). Included in campus diversity are not only students representing diverse backgrounds, but also faculty who are diverse. However, unwelcoming environments can overshadow and counter the benefits of campus diversity.

While there is existing literature that addresses the barriers that inhibit Blacks and other minorities from achieving their goal of becoming certified teachers, there is a need for more research that incorporates the voices and perspectives of Black teachers. Though Black and minority students have more postsecondary education options than past generations, findings from this study highlight the limitations that still hinder college students from fully enjoying their postsecondary experience. Participants in the present study expressed their appreciation for this study because it was the first time that they were asked to describe their lived experiences. During the interviews, the participants expressed their interest in improving the experiences of future Black and minority students by identifying missing elements of their postsecondary experience. Each participant mentioned individuals, offices, and organizations which contributed to their success. However, there is more that can be done to make sure that all students feel comfortable and succeed at the postsecondary level.

This study provided insight into the resilience of Black teachers during their teacher preparation, described and explored obstacles that confronted the participants,

and identified supports that were used to achieve success. Having firsthand knowledge of this information will help Morehead State University to establish programs, initiatives, and support systems to increase the number of teacher education majors enrolled at the institution. Indeed, Morehead State University has been at the forefront of inclusion and diversity among its peers in Kentucky. However, this study provided an opportunity for former students to discuss their experiences and lend their voices to promote continuous change for generations to come.

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APPENDIX A**LETTER OF INVITATION**

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is La Raissa Davis-Morris. I am an Ed. D candidate in Morehead State University's Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. In order to fulfill degree requirements, I am required to complete a capstone project. My applied project is entitled "Strategies for Thriving: A Qualitative Study of Black teachers who participated in Morehead State University's teacher preparation program." This project is under the direction of Dr. Daryl R. Privott, Associate Professor at Morehead State University located in Morehead, Kentucky. I would like to interview Black teachers who attended and graduated from Morehead State University to learn more about the experiences of Black teachers who earned initial certification at the predominately White institution.

Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and will consist of semi-structured, open-ended questions. Because of the significant geographic distance between the researcher and participants, interviews will be conducted via telephone and digitally recorded using WebEx. All participants will receive a pseudonym to protect their identity. Interviews will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. Recordings and transcriptions will remain in possession of the researcher in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after the study is complete. Participation in this study is voluntary and uncompensated. This study will not inflict any harm and participants have the option to cease participation at any time.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Black teachers who participated in Morehead State University's teacher education program regarding their experiences and the factors that contributed to their success and empowerment. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be contributing valuable information to the field of higher education as it relates to increasing the number of minority teachers not only in the Commonwealth of Kentucky but also at the national level. You will also contribute valuable insight into the supports and strategies that assist Blacks in becoming certified as teachers.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email La Raissa Davis-Morris at lsdavi01@moreheadstate.edu no later than (INSERT DATE) to schedule an individual interview. In advance, thank you for your time and consideration!

Thank you,

La Raissa Davis-Morris, Ed. D Candidate

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I _____, agree to participate in a research study titled, “Strategies for Thriving: A Qualitative Study of Black teachers who participated in Morehead State University’s teacher preparation program.” My participation in this study is voluntary and I can end my participation at any time without any reason and without penalty. If I cease my participation, I can request that the researcher destroy all documents and recordings.

As a participant in this qualitative study, I will be contributing information in the areas of minority student resiliency and Black teacher shortages. In addition, my participation in this study will provide information that can assist institutions of higher education in addressing the obstacles that prevent minority students from successfully achieving teacher certification.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of Black teachers about their experiences as education majors at Morehead State University. Though I will not receive any financial compensation for my participation in this study, my participation will assist colleges and universities in understanding the factors that contribute to the success of minority education majors in their pursuit of initial teacher certification.

If I agree to participate in this study, I agree to complete/fulfill the following:

- 1) I will participate in an individual interview. During my participation in the interview, I will discuss my experience as an undergraduate education major at Morehead State University. This interview should not last more than one hour, this interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. I will have the opportunity to review my transcription prior to publication.
- 2) I will complete and submit a demographic survey and select a pseudonym to protect my identity. The survey data will provide the researcher with information about my background, age gender, and current position.
- 3) I will not experience discomfort or stress because of my participation in this study. There are no anticipated risks expected.

All information will remain confidential. Information that may be easily identifiable will be removed. I will receive a copy of this signed document. The researcher will answer any additional questions about the study prior to or during the research project. You can email the researcher at lsdavi01@moreheadstate.edu.

By signing this consent form, I agree that the researcher has satisfactorily answered my questions and I agree to voluntarily participate in this study.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

Any additional questions that I have regarding my rights as a participant in this research study should be directed to the Morehead State University Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX C**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Pseudonym _____

What years did you attend Morehead State University? _____

What year did you graduate? _____

1. How many years have you been teaching? ----- years

My current school district is described as ☐ Urban ☐ Rural ☐ Suburban2. What year did you declare education as a major? ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior3. Were you a transfer student? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Which range best describes your age?

☐ 18-21 ☐ 22-25 ☐ 26-29 ☐ 30-33 ☐ 34-37 ☐ 38-41 ☐ 42-45 ☐ 46-49 ☐ 50-53 ☐ 54+

5. What area(s) do you hold certification in? _____

6. How were you recruited to your undergraduate institution?

☐ College Fair ☐ Employee/Colleague Referral ☐ Professional Organization ☐ Legacy☐ Other, please explain. _____7. Do you have any immediate family members that are teachers? ☐ Yes ☐ No8. Prior to being admitted to the college, were you informed about the Minority Education Recruitment and Retention (MERR/MTEP) program at your undergraduate institution? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, how did you learn about the program? _____9. Did you participate in any MTEP/MERR sponsored programs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, how many? _____ If so, please describe the event(s) _____

10. Did you pass the Praxis on your first attempt? Yes ☐ No

If so, how many times did you take the exam? _____

11. Did you participate in any form of school-sponsored preparation for the test?

Yes ☐ No

12. How many times did you apply to your institution's teacher education program?

☐ 1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 5-6 ☐ 7 or more

APPENDIX D**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. How would you describe your experience at Morehead State University? Tell me about your college experience at Morehead State University.
 - a. Why did you choose MSU/ MSU's teacher education program?
 - b. What was your experience like in general education courses?
 - c. What was your experience like in your teacher preparation courses?
2. Did you receive instruction from a minority faculty member as a student at Morehead State University? If so, what course(s) and what classification were you? How did the experience of being taught by a minority faculty member differ from being taught by a non-minority faculty member?
3. Describe a time when you were you confronted with an issue specifically related to being a Black teacher education major. Give me an example(s) of strategies that you used to overcome the issue.
4. Describe the factors that you feel contributed to your empowerment as a Black teacher education major? Describe specific strategies that other Blacks who may have an interest in pursuing teaching as a profession can use to achieve initial certification at Morehead State University.
5. Describe the resources that existed to support Black education majors at Morehead State University? Describe any resource(s) that feel would have contributed to your success?
6. Can you provide an example of a time when you reached the point where you considered changing your major? If so, what factors encouraged you to continue as a teacher education major?
7. Do you feel that your experience as a Black teacher education major at a predominantly White institution prepared you with the necessary skills to enter the field of teaching?
8. Is there any additional input that you would like to add?

VITA

LARAISSA S. DAVIS-MORRIS

EDUCATION

December, 2002	Bachelor of Arts Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky
December, 2005	Master of Arts Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky
Pending	Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

01/03-01/06	Admissions Counselor Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky
01/06-08/08	Multicultural Student Services Coordinator Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky
01/08-08/12	Special Education Teacher and Curriculum Coach Fayette County Public Schools Lexington, Kentucky
01/08-08/12	Admissions Counselor Chattahoochee Technical College Marietta, Georgia

HONORS

Spring 2018	Outstanding Graduate Student in Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky
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